

# A Sermon for DaySpring

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**“It all Belongs to God”**

Jeremiah 29: 1, 4-7; Luke 17: 11-19

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There are two texts on this significant day... and two simple points. Jeremiah and Luke have something to say to us all on Covenant Day at DaySpring.

We refer to this day as Covenant Day and not as Anniversary Day. While this day does provoke some nostalgia and “remember when”... it’s really much more about “what now.” It is a day for gazing back with gratitude... it is that. And remembering our story and “the way we were” is important. But it’s not nearly so important as seeing this day clearly and saying yes to it.

I’m glad we refer to this day as Covenant Day and not Anniversary Day or as Vision Day. It’s not a day for gazing off into “what if” land... it’s not so much about dreaming the future, as it is being present to this now and faithful to this opportunity and to what is.

On Covenant Day, we plant two feet down here, in this time and space, with these people and we say... “yes.”

That was a difficult thing for the folks to do who had been carried off into exile. Remember, that fearsome and powerful empire from up North, Babylon, had conquered Judah and in 597, had hauled back to their country, all the leaders in the community.

They didn't take everyone... they took those who had special talents,  
the artists,  
the engineers,  
the craftsmen...

they even took the lawyers so they could keep an eye on them.

Their strategy was two-fold, not only would they deplete the fallen country of any leadership to foster a rebellion but they would increase the human resources back home.

They hauled these folks off, apparently with families and communities intact, lock stock and barrel away from their homes, away their spiritual headquarters, Jerusalem, away from all that they'd loved.

You can imagine the disposition of that exiled lot. Psalm 137 captures it... And it gives you a taste for the taste in their mouths. **"By the rivers of Babylon, we sat down and wept, we hung up our harps... while our captors asked us for songs."** You can picture the corporate depression that is rampant in the group.

**"Well we can't sing here for goodness sakes. Whoever heard of singing in captivity."**

**"And why should we build anything..."**

**Babylonian wood probably has termites."**

**"And why eat... we'll just get hungry again."**

**Or worse, we'll get Nebuchadnezzar's Revenge.**

**"Why marry, who'd want to raise kids in this country anyway."**

Godspell, the musical, had one number that reflected the pain and the pathos of this text. They translated it in this final sounding way, **"On the willows there, we hung up our lives."**

Look in the trees in Babylon... there by the river and you'll not only find harps but you'll find some hammers and a carpenter's square or two. And you'll find shovels and hoes and you'll find the poet's pencil and you'll find the preacher's pulpit. Most of all, you'll find their hopes.

**"We hung up our lives."**

Everyone's just sitting around, thinking about home. **"If I forget you Jerusalem, I hope I forget my skill..."** Maybe a bronze worker talking. **"May my tongue cleave to my mouth."** Maybe a great orator lamenting away.

They're depressed and they're angry and the songwriter just lets it all hand out towards the end of the song. It's rated R at best. Remember, these are published worship materials... they're songs... praise choruses of the day. **"O daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is he who repays you for what you have done to us... he who seizes your infant and dashes them against the rocks."**

**"Okay, let's all sing. Everybody... like you really mean it this time."** It's the only song they're singing there by the river.

Of course, they're hoping this captivity thing is short lived. And they even have some prognosticators, a prophet or two, who'll tell them what they want to hear.

**"Oh, yea... I see days of sunshine in the forecast."**

**This Babylonian Empire... just a flash in the pan.**

**We'll be home faster than you can say 'dradel'."**

There's never a short supply of preachers who will tell you what you want to hear... be suspicious of that sort of preaching. And of preachers who preach so you'll be pleased with them... (and that, btw, from one who is a pleaser). Jeremiah has a different approach and simply tells them what is.

**"You're going to be there a while folks. 70 years."**

So this is what God says, **"You need to build some houses and settle down."** Quit living in this tent village under the bridge, or in some "van down by the river."

**"Plant a garden and eat from it."** Nurture yourself and quit worrying that Babylonian soil is contaminated. You can even drink the water.

**"Get married and have babies."** Grow your families, your communities, get involved relationally. **"Seek the peace and prosperity of Babylon."** Now there's a stretch. Help the Babylonians... invest yourself... work with them. **"Pray for them."** Even crazier... God is their God too. Get spiritually involved in this culture.

Live your lives.

If you're a builder, build.

If you're a singer, sing.

If you're a parent, parent.

If you're a farmer, get to hoeing.

Invest in this now... and that's the word for us on Covenant Day from this prophet. Invest in what you can never possess. Give yourself, your time, your talent... work... even though it'll never be yours... you'll never control it. It isn't yours... invest anyway.

It's an important word for all of us here on Covenant Day. This place, this building, this body, isn't ours... and yet God invites us to give ourselves to it. It's important for all of us to hear... all of us.

You young adults... maybe here in Central Texas... exiled from your home. And you dream of it... The Southeast, maybe, where people every table has sweet tea.

Or you dream of someplace colder... where there's a real fall... and you'll never run an air conditioner on Thanksgiving Day. And where people don't say strange things like, "fixin to."

And here you find yourselves... just passing through in a way... And you know this place isn't home. But Jeremiah says, **"Invest yourselves in what you cannot possess."**

It's a word for all of us... For senior adults who say, **"I've done my time... 20 tours of**

**duty in VBS... a survivor of four building campaigns...** You've given, done your time. And it's not your eternal home but hear Jeremiah saying, **"Invest yourself in what will not be yours."**

It's a good word of all of us old DaySpringers... for sure. You who are watching "your" church change before your very eyes. More unfamiliar faces than familiar ones. You can no longer be close to everybody and every decision. And Jeremiah says, **"Invest in what you cannot possess."**

Invest in what you'll someday leave. Give your heart to what you'll say goodbye to. Certainly a word for a pastor to hear on Covenant Day.

The Church belongs to God.

Well, there is another text and another point... Luke has something to say as well. He tells us this story of these ten down and out lepers who beg for mercy from Jesus. And Jesus does an odd thing.

They're screaming, **"Heal us Jesus."**

And he yells back, **"Go show yourselves to the priest."**

And they look and one another sores and all...

and say, **"Well, okay."**

And off they go with their skin rotting off... shouting **unclean, unclean**, to see a priest... sort of like guy in the county in charge of Infectious Diseases Control.

On the way, with folks parting faster than the Red Sea all around them... they're healed. Luke is careful to say, **"And has they went, they were cleansed."**

And they stopped in amazement... they felt something new coursing through their bodies... and they saw old familiar wounds going away... and they felt alive. Then the dirty cloaks and rags came off... and they jumped up and down and hugged one another. And all the Jewish former lepers, continued on their way to the priest... so they could get their seal of approval and be let back in the temple and into society.

The Samaritan... did something else, he saw something else... knew something else. So, he returned to say thanks to Jesus, the true source of his healing and wholeness.

The others didn't. For one thing, they were so stuck in convention, in the patterned and prescribed. This is just what you do if you happen to be healed of leprosy... you head to the temple.

But I suspect that also, that hadn't really made the Jesus connection. One said, **"It was that we were walking towards Jerusalem... see, the closer we got to the temple the better we felt."**

Another chimed in, **"Yeah, that and the fact that we were all together... we were walking so close together and the good feelings among us did it."**

**"Or maybe it was that we were talking so deep as we went. It's that we're so deep and pious, that's it."**

Someone else thought it was the fact that they had broken the social rules and that they been so innovative by walking as lepers where they weren't supposed to be walking. **"It's our willingness to push the boundaries that led to this cleansing."**

One, more mystical among them, said, **"Well actually, I was humming that new contemporary song, 'Shout to Yahweh,'"** maybe it was the new music that saved us.

The Samaritan, the outsider (a big thing for Luke) is the one who made the connection... The one who is most far from the center is the one who sees. He smiled... did an about-face and went back to the source of his healing.

That's the text and the simple point is, remember the source of your healing. And it's hard, when you feel something new coursing through your body... and you see old familiar wounds going away... and you feel alive. And dirty cloaks and rags are coming off... and there's lots of hugging going on... and joy. It's hard to not confuse the source of our healing with the instrument of it.

On Covenant Day, even as we give thanks and celebrate our church, we remember who is the source of our healing. If you're feeling some new life these days... and appreciating faith in perhaps a new way.

It isn't because of a pretty place...  
some temple...

you made your way to.

And not because some church you've discovered is innovative, or sacred or simple... or committeeless.

If you're finding new life here be careful... it isn't about the instrument. It's not that you're hanging out with nicer or friendlier people... or folks who have it together somehow.

It's certainly not that the pastor is smarter or good-looking.

It's not even that the best pianist in town is there.

It is because the Eternal Word made known in Christ is finding you and touching your life and knowing you. You may be discovering some new conduits or some instrument in this church... but don't confuse that for the source.

Take your gratitude to the source of your healing. It's not good... even disastrous to our spiritual health, and to a church for us to get that confused.

Because churches will let you down...

And people will come and go...

And pastors will forget your name... and forget to call.

Forms will change... songs... styles.

And you'll outgrow certain instruments of healing... you will... and you'll discover new ones, but the source will never change... not ever.

On Covenant Day, we do not primarily celebrate DaySpring, we celebrate God... who is our source and sustainer. The Source is infinite... the instruments are finite and limited and you cannot get from them what you need most... LIFE. Celebrate them... but do not return to them. Be glad for who we are as a church... but never take your eyes off Jesus.

The gratitude belongs to God.

I always preach mostly to myself. And these are the two things I heard God saying to me this week from a prophet and a gospel writer.

Invest in what isn't yours. The Church belongs to God.

Remember and return to the Source of your healing. The gratitude belongs to God.

It all belongs to God.

A truth I need to hear... A couple of "covenant day shoes" that that fit me. If the shoes fit for you, you're welcome to them. Amen.