A Hopeful End

Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.

It was the end of hope!

- It was the dreaded end of a season when the long breezy days of rest are overtaken by the short dark days of winter.
  - It was one of those harsh moments in history when hope was completely overcome by despair.
    - When a thing that had started out so well came to an ugly and sudden ending.
- Israel’s splendor was being plundered by the Babylonians.
  - Judah’s strength was spent,
  - the legacy of King David had faltered,
  - and the seed of Abraham was once more marching away into bondage and oppression.
    - It had started so well, established by God, the nation of Israel had begun in such hope and expectation.
- Once it had been the envy of the world,
  - once they had travelled from afar to survey its riches and beauty.
    - But now it was reduced to ruins.
- Treasures had been squandered,
  - blessings had been wasted,
  - armies had diminished
  - and a season of hope and promise was drawing to an terrible end.

As an army of heathen prepared to sweep through the land, Jeremiah lifted his prophetic voice in poetic prose and declared the end of hope!

- In a single verse he summarizes the pitiful condition of Judah.
- **The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved** the prophet recorded in Jeremiah 8:20.
- Harvest is past.
- Summer is ended.
- And we are not saved!
- What a pitiful cry.
- What a horrible condition.
- Judgment has come, the end has arrived, mercy has run out – and we are lost.
- It is too late!
- It’s a cry of desperation!
- It’s a cry of resignation.
- The end has come.
- It came before we expected it.
- We heard the warnings.
• We knew it was about to happen.
• But we were so caught up in what we were doing.
• Other things seemed more important.
• And now the night is upon us.
• Now the hour has grown too late.
• Now the harvest is past, the summer has ended and we are not saved.

What a horrible condition.
• What a terrible state to find oneself in.
• It is too late.
• I am reminded of the unfortunate people of Noah’s day who spurned every opportunity to enter the ark,
  o who ignored that devoted preacher of righteousness,
    ▪ only to discover, after the door was closed, how close the end really was.
    ▪ I don’t doubt that they beat on the door of the ark,
      • I don’t doubt that they cried with lament.
  o A season has ended, a time of mercy has come to a close, and we are not saved.
    ▪ There was nothing Noah could do – no way he could open the ark – indeed it was too late!

That was the condition of Judah as Jeremiah prophesied to them.
• They had spurned God’s mercy,
  o they had rejected the prophetic calls for repentance,
  o they had ignored every sign of the season that was drawing to a close.
• They were too caught up in life,
  o too busy with everything that was going on,
  o they were too successful, too satisfied,
  o too complacent or perhaps too distracted.
• Whatever it was, they ignored the pleas of heaven until it was too late.
  o Harvest was past.
  o Summer was ended.
  o And finally it sunk in – we are lost.
• It started out so well, they had begun so good, the whole thing had been so highly blessed of God – but the end of it was a terrible thing to behold.
  o Stripped of all their earthly possessions,
    ▪ robbed of all dignity,
      • as slaves they were marched at the point of a sword away from their promised land and into a land of captivity.

All too often we start a thing much better than we end it.
• The real truth behind our annual New Year’s Resolutions is that they highlight the places in our lives where we’ve not ended the year as strongly as we started the year.
  o It seems that every January starts with a pledge to read the bible through in a year, a pledge to pray more, a pledge to fast more, a pledge to grow closer to God.
  o But in the course of the year, life happens and we tend to end the year with the realization that, once again, we’ve failed in those pursuits.
  o The season is over. The year is ended.
  o Time has run out.
  o And some of us lament the fact that we’ve not maintained our personal devotion.
  o Or we’ve not kept up our bible reading plan.
  o Or we’ve, once again, slipped away from fasting on a regular basis.
  o We are not all that different than Judah in Jeremiah’s day –
    ▪ The harvest is past, summer is ended and we are not saved.
    ▪ The year is over, its too late now, and we’ve failed at some very important things in our lives.
• We’ve let life overtake our dreams, with let distractions derail our destinies and, for many of us, we are not standing where we wanted to stand at the end of 2011 – but time has run out.
  o Its too late.
  o The season has ended and we are lost.
  o What began with high hopes and heady dreams ends on low notes of disappointment and frustration.

But it doesn’t have to be that way.
• In the midst of that moment that marked the end of hope, Jeremiah made the prophecy that has become our text tonight.
  o Speaking with the voice of God, he said, “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.”
• That phrase “expected end” is really important to me tonight because it is a combination of two Hebrew nouns in a structure that allows one to become an adjective to the other.
  o The first noun is the Hebrew word for hope or expectation and the second is the word for end or future.
• In that dark dismal hour, where hope ended, Jeremiah turned his prophetic gaze 70 years into the future and began to speak about a hopeful end!
  o His prophecy is about an ending that is better than the beginning!
• It’s about an end that far outshines the beginning.
  o Looking forward to deliverance, looking forward to a conclusion of captivity, looking forward to a brighter day – Jeremiah declares, at the end of hope, that there can be a hopeful ending!
I want to propose a new kind of resolution tonight: In 2012 lets end better than we start!

• Let's purpose in our hearts to start out right, to resolve to get closer to God, to resolve to draw nearer to him, to make personal sacrifices, to have times of daily bible reading and daily prayer as well as regular fasting – but let's purpose from the start to end stronger than we begin!
  o Let's not come to the end of 2012 and be forced to lay the same foundations all over again.
  o Let's end this year better than we begin!
  o In order to do that I believe that we need to focus on three things: Lets Recommit; Lets Rebuild; and Lets Renew.

First of all we need to recommit ourselves to vision of this church.

• My vision for this church has always been that we would be a Modern Day book of Acts church.
  o Every year we revisit that principle.
  o This year I'm asking you to recommit yourself to the goal of being an authentic, genuine, apostolic church.
  o Our world is hungry for a real church.
  o Our world is hungry for genuine worship.
  o Our world is hungry for a place where people know how to pray and know how to touch the throne of God.
  o Let's recommit ourselves to being that church.
  o Our theme for the year is simply to be an Authentic Church!
  o Authentic Church!

YOU are an important part of that vision.

• The church is not a building.
  o The church is not a social club.
  o The church is the Body of Christ.

• This year we are focusing on building the church – not the building.
  o At the end of this year, I want each of us to be closer to the cross than we are right now.
  o At the end of this year, I want each of us to know him better than we do now.
  o At the end of this year I want us all to have improved in areas of personal growth and consistency.
    ▪ Because WE are the church!

• If we are going to have an authentic spirit filled church then you will have to be authentic spirit filled people!
  o Your level of personal devotion affects the church!
  o Your personal prayer life impacts our services.
    ▪ When you fast, we feel the difference when we come together for church.
When you get your mind on spiritual things and neglect the distractions that keep you from being what God wants you to be – it has an impact on the church!

- You are the church.

- If we are going to have an authentic church then you are going to have to be an authentic Christian – in every facet of your life!

As we recommit to the vision, I believe that we desperately need to rebuild our altars.

- Both in the church and in our homes we need to focus rebuilding the altars.
  - We won’t have a genuine move of God on a consistent basis in this church if we can’t learn to spend more than 5 minutes around an altar before service.
    - The heart of the church is what happens around the altar.
    - The potential of each service revolves around what happens in the altar before the service.

- We can celebrate the notion that we need to be authentic.
  - We can applaud the notion that we need a genuine move of God but I we aren’t willing to spend some time in the altars then we won’t ever have the kind of move of God that we desire.

- An authentic church requires authentic altars!
  - It requires an authentic place of prayer where you empty your heart of self and pray, not my will but thine be done!

We also need to rebuild the altars in our homes!

- What happens in our homes has a direct and dramatic impact on what happens in the church.
  - Where there is no prayer in the home there is no power in the church!
    - If we want to be an authentic church then we need authentic altars in our homes!

- I once heard elder Denver Stanford say that the key to a powerful public prayer was much private prayer.
  - The same principle holds true in our services.
    - The key to powerful public service lies in much private prayer.
    - The key to anointed public singing lies in anointed private prayer.
    - The key to life changing public preaching lies in life changing private prayer.

- A powerful church, an anointed church, an authentic church is the result of powerful, anointed, authentic disciples of Christ sitting on the pews, playing the instruments, leading the services, singing the songs, and preaching the sermons.
  - When we pray in private we will have public anointing.
    - When we seek him in hidden places he will bless us in very public places.
If we want to find favor with this city, we need to find favor before the throne.
  - If we want to impact our family we need to build ourselves an altar.
  - If we want the powerful anointing of God we need to recognize that it flows from an altar that has a fresh sacrifice upon it.

If we want to end better than we begin the year then we must end the year on the same altars that we rebuild at the beginning of the year!

As we recommit ourselves to the vision, as we rebuild our altars, we need to focus on renewing ourselves in the Lord.

- It’s a new year.
  - We ought to start it out with a new anointing.
    - The church will be renewed when you are renewed.
  - The church will be refreshed when you are refreshed.
    - I believe that we should focus on ending this year better than we start it but I also believe that we should start it with a fresh outpouring of his spirit in our lives!

- It’s my desire that each of us would be completely renewed in the Holy Ghost.
  - Its my desire that you would start this year with such a blessing that you would wonder, how could it end any better than it began?
    - A better ending will flow from a better beginning!

- You should purpose in your heart to start each day with a renewing of his presence.
  - You ought to renew yourself daily in the goodness of God.
    - Make it a priority for you this year to make his spirit fresh each day of the year this year.
      - If you do that you will discover that it only gets sweeter as the days go by.
        - You can’t help but end the year better than you started it if you continually renew yourself in the Lord every day of the year!

Close

The wise preacher shared a timeless truth in Ecclesiastes 7:8 when he said: **Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof.**

- God puts more emphasis on the end of a thing than he does the beginning. Consider Jesus’ often repeated declaration: “He that shall endure unto the end shall be saved.”
  - At the beginning of 2012 I ask you to consider the fact that it is far more important how you end this year than it is how you begin it.
    - Lets start it out right.
- Lets purpose to get closer to God, to grow in our personal devotion, to recommit to the vision, to rebuild our altars and to renew ourselves in the lord – but let us do it all with the goal of ending better than we started.
o When February rolls around and the fervor of a new year begins to wear off, let us remind ourselves that the end of a thing is better than the beginning.
  ▪ As the winter gives way to spring and spring yields to the summer let us reinforce in our heart that the end is more important than the beginning.

• Let us purpose this year to arrive at the end of the year with stronger than we started, better than we began.
  o If we do, we will see revival, we will see growth, we will experience his blessings as we experience an end that is better than our beginning.

It starts right here.
• We start by recommitting ourselves to the vision.
  o We start by rebuilding the altars in our lives.
    ▪ We start by renewing ourselves in the Lord!
• That's the way we begin and, in 2012, we purpose to end better than we begin!
  o Let us begin here. Let us begin now.
    ▪ Let us find a place a pray until we've been renewed in the Holy Ghost.
  • Let us end better than we begin!