

June 21st, 2020

Finding Courage to Hope!

Sermon Summary

This message looks at the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel concerning the hope of restoration of Israel. Both men had prophesied the judgement of God because of the terrible sin and breach of the covenant! However, they both spoke of God's forgiveness for His people and the future He had in store for them. The message looks deeply at the fulfillment of these prophecies in Jesus and the establishment of the New Covenant. The Holy Spirit's role in their fulfillment is also studied and many practical applications to our lives for finding hope today are brought out! The main passages from this coming week's readings are Jeremiah 31, 33 and Ezekiel 37. Jeremiah 7 lays the foundation for the message and several New Testament passages are used to show the fulfillment of the prophecies.

Full Sermon Notes

"And day by day I know He will renew me until I stand with joy before the throne. To this I hold, my hope is only Jesus, All the glory evermore to Him!" What a blessed hope we have in Jesus! He paid a debt He didn't owe because we owed a debt we couldn't pay! God is amazing. When the circumstances of this world have left you with no hope, God steps in to bring you hope! And I'll say this, those who find their hope in God have a hope and a joy that passes all understanding! It's a blessed hope, a know so hope, not a hope so some day, but a know so one day! People who just hope things are going to turn out okay and believe things are just left to chance, either live in a constant state of anxiety, or they've decided to just go with the flow and not really care what happens. And with a deadly pandemic that has killed thousands, still out there, and the division we are now seeing in our country, we need the kind of hope that can only come from a source above and beyond human wisdom and power! So let's pray and ask God to help us find the courage to hope, and that our hope will not be misplaced, but placed in Him alone!! Let's pray!!

Misplaced Hope

You might remember how the Israelites had begun trusting in the temple to save them. They thought since the temple of the Lord was in Jerusalem, nothing could take them down. They believed the temple itself was so important to the Lord He would never allow anything to happen to it so they felt they were covered with protection simply because the temple was in their city! It's not unlike people today who think church attendance is the ticket to God's blessing no matter how they live their lives the other 6 days of the week. Nothing could be further from the truth! I'm so glad our children are with us today. Kids, I want you to know that God doesn't live in the church building, He lives in our hearts! We come to this building to learn about God and to worship God together, but God is also with us out there in the world and how we live our lives out there really matters! Adults, let me make this practical for us as well. I love the statement "God Bless America," but just saying that phrase will not bring God's blessings on America! I believe God wants to bless America, but, like the Hebrews, if we are not living according to the principles of God when it comes to morality, justice, truthfulness, generosity, sanctity of life, and

righteousness, then we can't expect His blessings! The Israelites were depending on the temple to secure God's blessing, regardless of their lifestyles. When you read your readings this week, you'll find that God not only allowed the people to be taken into captivity because of their extreme wickedness, but He also allowed the dismantling and destruction of the very temple in which the people had placed their trust. Here's what God told Jeremiah to tell the people...

Jer 7:1 This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD:

Jer 7:2 "Stand at the gate of the Lord's house and there proclaim this message: "Hear the word of the LORD, all you people of Judah who come through these gates to worship the LORD.

Jer 7:3 This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place.

Jer 7:4 Do not trust in deceptive words and say, "This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!"

Jer 7:5 If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly,

Jer 7:6 if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm,

Jer 7:7 then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your forefathers for ever and ever.

Jer 7:8 But look, you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless.

Jer 7:9 "Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known,

Jer 7:10 and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, "We are safe"--safe to do all these detestable things?

Now this may sound like a terrible way to start a sermon on Hope! But we must understand that misplaced hope is no hope at all! Blessed hope can only be found when we place our hope in the truth and faithfulness of God and His promises to us! If we trust in other things we will be sadly disappointed! We are not unlike the Hebrew people. I'm afraid there are many under the false assumption in America that our prosperity and power are proof of God's blessing. However, if we are misusing that prosperity and power for our own selfish ends and are not being good stewards of that prosperity and power then God may very well thrust us from His presence and remove His hand of blessing! Folks, we don't want that to happen. And we must ask this question as well: Are we placing our hope in things other than God? What are we depending on? What are you depending on for hope and meaning in life? Is it your career, a human relationship, your 401 K, your popularity, the number of people following you on Tictoc, twitter, facebook?

I realize that Jeremiah chapter 7 is not in our reading plan for this week, but I'm bridging the gap between last week's message on finding courage to repent and today's message of finding courage to hope. What I'm about to point out to you from the verses we just read in chapter 7 could be a stand alone sermon, but today it's a foundation for finding courage to hope. God speaks through Jeremiah seven very powerful prerequisites for finding the courage to hope. He said...

Hear the word of the LORD
Reform your ways and your actions
Do not trust in deceptive words
Deal with each other justly,
Do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow
Do not shed innocent blood
Do not follow other gods to your own harm

Real hope, hope that has substance, hope that will come to reality has to be based on those principles God gave Jeremiah. If we are to find the courage to hope we must not misplace our hope. In other words, we find courage to hope when we are listening to God, repenting of our sin, rejecting words of deception, acting justly, caring for those in difficult situations, praying for those in authority to be led by God in every decision they make, and not allowing anything to take priority over our trust in God!

Now let me point out something to you! There was a remnant in Israel and Judah who had not forsaken the Lord. They were trying to live according to the principles God had given them. That remnant was probably why God waited as long as He did to bring judgement on the land. Could that be the case in America? I believe there is a remnant who are faithful to God and are praying for this nation to turn back to God. And let me just say this to you fathers out there, if there has ever been a time when our nation needs Godly fathers to stand in the gap spiritually for their families it's now! And there is reason to Hope God will hear our prayers and it's because of God's character!

Finding Courage to Hope in God's Heart (The Covenant Formula)

We find courage to Hope when we recognize our needs and understand God's character in wanting to meet our needs! In your readings for this week you will see how Jeremiah, known as the weeping prophet, has another side to him. Even in the midst of Jeremiah's pain and sorrow, he still finds hope for the future of God's people! If you had been alive at the time of Jeremiah's prophecies you might have considered him a pessimist. B.H. Carroll, the late president of the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas said...

"Most of the teaching of Jeremiah up to this point is permeated with the note of sadness and of doom, the theme of which is destruction. From this Jeremiah might be called a thorough-going pessimist, but here we shall see that he was anything but a pessimist. He was one of the greatest optimists. When his nation seemed so determined to go on in sin and rebellion against God and hence to destruction, Jeremiah could be nothing but a pessimist, so far as the immediate future of his country was concerned. There is such a thing as a sane and sensible pessimism. The man who is a pessimist when he sees that sin is unbridled in its way over the people, is the only man who takes a sane view of the situation. But in this passage we will see that Jeremiah was one of the greatest optimists that the world ever saw."

And speaking of finding courage to hope when it would actually seem insane to hope, listen to what Jeremiah said in the first few verses of chapter 31.

Jer 31:1 "At that time," declares the LORD, "I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they will be my people."

Jer 31:2 This is what the LORD says: "The people who survive the sword will find favor in the desert; I will come to give rest to Israel."

Jer 31:3 The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.

Jer 31:4 I will build you up again and you will be rebuilt, O Virgin Israel. Again you will take up your tambourines and go out to dance with the joyful.

We see the covenant formula in verse 31:1...

Jer 31:1 "At that time," declares the LORD, "I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they will be my people."

And then in verse 16 and 17 we see these words of hope...

Jer 31:16 This is what the LORD says: "Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for your work will be rewarded," declares the LORD. "They will return from the land of the enemy.

Jer 31:17 So there is hope for your future," declares the LORD...

So Jeremiah had some pretty strong hope for the future of God's people. However, there was a problem! Remember the covenant formula we've seen over and over in the Old Testament...

"Be my people and I'll be your God!"

God wanted to be the people's God! He took the initiative to have a relationship with them. From Adam and Eve, to Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, the various judges, King David, King Solomon and the other Kings of the Northern and Southern kingdoms, God was constantly reaching out to the people to establish an ongoing relationship! So the problem was not with God, but with the people! God had given them the Ten Commandments as a guideline for their relationship, but there was a major problem that made things seem hopeless! The people were sinners by nature and couldn't live up to the letter of the law or the intent of the law! The covenant was a two way agreement between God and man, but man was weakened in his human nature to such an extent that he continually broke the covenant. In fact Paul wrote this in Romans 8:3a...

Rom 8:3 For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature...

This fact was not lost on God! The Psalmist, King David said...

Psa 103:13 As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;

Psa 103:14 for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.

So where do we find the courage to hope?

Finding Courage to Hope in God's Plan (The New Covenant)

Jer 31:31 "The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.

Jer 31:32 It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them, " declares the LORD.

Jer 31:33 "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

Jer 31:34 No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

The covenant formula is found in the New Covenant as well as the Old Covenant! He said " I will be their God, and they will be my people!"

Now, how was God going to put His law in their minds and write it on their hearts? It was a process. First of all, there were already certain things God had put in the consciousness of human beings from the start. Basic morals of right and wrong. Listen to this in Romans...

Rom 1:18 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness,

Rom 1:19 since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.

Rom 1:20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

Most theologians consider this a description of natural revelation. We are able to see some aspects of God in creation. The way I put it is like this:

You can always see a little bit of an artist in their art. Creation is God's art and it is on display 24/7! We can learn some things about God in natural revelation! The complex order of creation, the beauty of creation, the miracle of creation and life itself! But there was room for

mis-interpretation in this, and the evil nature of fallen humankind twisted things for its own desires and people began worshipping the creation instead of the Creator! Paul says...

Rom 1:25 They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator--who is forever praised. Amen.

So here's what God did. God made things very clear when He revealed through Moses His Ten Commandments and revealed to them some very specific interpretations of those basic laws. The first command was to have no other gods! However, people had become so weakened by their sinful nature that they were unable to keep even the basic 10 commandments! And again, as I said earlier, this fact was not lost on God. One of the reasons for His forgiving spirit was His understanding of our weakness. But for many, it was not like they wanted to do good and were just weak. Many no longer wanted to do good and were darkened and began to suppress the truth! When that happened, God was left with no other choice but judgement.

Of course we see throughout the Old Testament with God's people, if the people were willing to repent, God would forgive them and restore them. But, as we've seen, it was a terrible cycle. The people are restored, then slip back into terrible sin, God brings judgement, the people cry out for forgiveness, God restores them, repeat! Was there an answer? Was there a way to end the horrible cycle? Was there any possible way to find courage to hope? You may feel like you've been in one of those endless cycles and are asking the same question: Is there any possible way to find courage to hope? After all, I'm a sinner too!

What I'm about to tell you is fascinating! What I'm about to tell you is the reason we can find courage to hope! What I'm about to share with you is how God fulfilled the prophecy Jeremiah gave concerning the covenant being written on hearts and minds. What I'm about to tell you is a game changer! God was going to make a new covenant with the people, but in order for that to happen He would have to do something almost unthinkable, unimaginable, unbelievable. Notice I said almost unbelievable! Check this out...

Jer 33:14 "'The days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will fulfill the gracious promise I made to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah.

Jer 33:15 "'In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line; he will do what is just and right in the land.

Jer 33:16 In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness.'

Jer 33:17 For this is what the LORD says: 'David will never fail to have a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel,

Jer 33:18 nor will the priests, who are Levites, ever fail to have a man to stand before me continually to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings and to present sacrifices.'"

Finding Courage to Hope in The One Who Made The New Covenant Possible

Who would this Righteous Branch be, this priest who would continually stand before God Almighty to present offerings and sacrifices for our sins? Who could possibly be that righteous? Who could be both High Priest and Sacrificial Lamb at the same time? Let's find out! Prepare to be blown away by these verses from the book of Hebrews...

Heb 9:11 When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation.

Heb 9:12 He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.

Heb 9:13 The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean.

Heb 9:14 How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

Heb 9:15 For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance--now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

Talk about hope! Did you see that? Because the perfect, unblemished life Jesus lived was offered through the eternal Spirit, we are forgiven! Our consciences have been cleansed from acts that lead to death and we now have the privilege to serve the living God! We are no longer under the first covenant of the law where it's up to us to achieve righteousness by following the letter of the law! We have been offered grace through the death, burial and resurrection of God's One and Only Son Jesus! The law still matters, and God's principles are still valid, but we now have God's forgiveness for past mess ups and we now have available the very power of God almighty to live the principles and the intent of His law! Where does that power come from and how does God now write His laws and principles on our hearts and minds in this age of the New Covenant? Can you handle another fascinating truth that brings us courage to hope?

Finding Courage to Hope Because His Spirit Literally Lives in Us!

Jesus gave great hope to His disciples when he said...

The Holy Spirit Will Teach You!

John 14:26 But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

John 14:27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

So if you are willing to read, study and learn the teachings of Jesus, The Holy Spirit will help you remember them! What does this mean practically when it comes to finding courage to hope?

When you are tempted to despair: The Holy Spirit will remind you of what Jesus said: "Do not let your hearts be troubled!"

When you are tempted to fear: The Holy Spirit will remind you of what Jesus said: "Do not be afraid!"

When you are tempted to hate: The Holy Spirit will remind you of what Jesus said: "Love your neighbor as yourself!"

When you are tempted to judge, condemn, or not forgive: The Holy Spirit will remind you of what Jesus said:

Luke 6:37 "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

You might argue and say, "well that's fine to be reminded, but I don't have the power to be that good!" There's hope for that too...

The Holy Spirit Will Empower You!

Jesus said...

Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

The Holy Spirit will give you the power to be a witness to others not only with words, but with the testimony of your life! You will be able to share with others how God has given you the power to overcome the sin that once bound you and controlled you! You will be a witness of how God helped you love those you never thought you could love, forgive those you never thought you could forgive, and to give your life in service to God by willingly serving others! You will show others how God has given you strength to overcome hardships and difficulties in this life and still find meaning and hope even through the pain!

So now that we've seen how Jeremiah's very hopeful prophecy for God's people, was powerfully fulfilled in Jesus and the New Covenant, I want to end the message with an illustration from the other prophet you will read in our reading plan this week, Ezekiel, and I'll show you its amazing fulfillment in the New Testament! Listen to what God told Ezekiel to prophesy...

Ezek 36:26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

Ezek 36:27 And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

Ezek 36:28 You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God.

That was his prophecy, now listen to the vision God gave him to go along with the prophecy.

Ezek 37:1 The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones.

Ezek 37:2 He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry.

Ezek 37:3 He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, "O Sovereign LORD, you alone know."

Ezek 37:4 Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!'"

Ezek 37:5 This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life.

Ezek 37:6 I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD."

Ezek 37:7 So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone.

Ezek 37:8 I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

Ezek 37:9 Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'"

Ezek 37:10 So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet--a vast army.

Ezek 37:11 Then he said to me: "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.'"

Ezek 37:12 Therefore prophecy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel.'

Ezek 37:13 Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them.

Ezek 37:14 I will put my Spirit in you and you will live,

Now for the fulfillment, in the New Testament...

Acts 2:1 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.

Acts 2:2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.

Acts 2:3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.

Acts 2:4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Acts 2:5 Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven.

Acts 2:6 When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language.

Acts 2:7 Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans?"

Acts 2:8 Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?

Acts 2:9 Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,

Acts 2:10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome

Acts 2:11 (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs--we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!"

Acts 2:12 Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"

Peter explains...

Acts 2:22 "Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.

Acts 2:23 This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.

Acts 2:24 But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

Acts 2:25 David said about him: "'I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.

Acts 2:26 Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope,

Acts 2:27 because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.

Acts 2:28 You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.'

Acts 2:29 "Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day.

Acts 2:30 But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne.

Acts 2:31 Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay.

Acts 2:32 God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.

Acts 2:33 Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.

Now that's how I find the courage to Hope in this troubled world, and if you are willing to allow Jesus to be your Savior, He will pour His Spirit into your heart and mind and you will come alive spiritually and discover hope! How do I know this? Peter's sermon also included this promise...

Acts 2:21 And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

Let's pray!