

HOPE IN THE MIDST OF UPHEAVAL

- A. Introduction: Jesus Christ is coming back in the not too distant future to establish the visible kingdom of God on earth. His return is our blessed, happy hope. Titus 2:13
1. The Bible says His return will be preceded by increasingly troubled and chaotic times. Paul called these times perilous or fierce. Jesus called them the birth pangs of a new age. II Tim 3:1; Matt 24:8
 - a. We're experiencing the beginning of those times and life is going to get more and more challenging. It's vital that we know how to navigate through the months and years ahead.
 - b. The key is learning how to look at things in terms of the big picture. This is the big picture: A plan is unfolding. God created human beings to become His sons and daughters through faith in Christ and He made the earth to be home for His family. Eph 1:4,5; Isa 45:18
 1. The family and the family home have been marred by sin. God devised a plan to undo the damage and carry out His purpose (redemption). Gen 3:17-19; Rom 5:12;19; Rev 13:8; etc.
 2. Jesus went to the Cross to pay the price for sin so sinners can be transformed into righteous, holy sons and daughters through faith in Him. He returned to Heaven. But He'll come again to cleanse the family home and complete God's plan to have a family on earth.
 - c. There are many reasons for the chaos preceding the Lord's return (lessons for another day). Here's the point for now. Although God is not behind the chaos He is well aware of it and able to use it to serve His purposes of gathering a family. And He's able to get those who've responded to His call to become His sons through whatever is ahead. Therefore we have hope. Eph 1:18
 2. In recent weeks, as part of our discussion of the hope to which we've been called, we've been talking about the anxiety in our country over the presidential election. It has been a long, ugly campaign.
 - a. Part of the anxiety leading up to the election came out of the fear that if "their" candidate wins and enacts "their" policies and programs it will be catastrophic. The election is over. Some are happy about the results. Others now have to deal with the fact that the other candidate won the election.
 - b. Don't be freaked out by the election results—either by who won or by the reaction of supporters of the one who lost. None of it is bigger than God. None of it surprised Him. Remember what we've already discussed.
 1. Jesus said that before He comes ETHNOS will rise against ETHNOS -- people groups against people groups (Matt 24:7). As Christians, we can't get caught in the trap of strive and fighting with each other over political, economic, social and racial issues and lose sight of what's most important -- that people come to saving knowledge of Jesus.
 2. The outcome of a political election in one year in one country doesn't change what's coming to the earth -- either the good (Jesus' return) or the bad (perilous times leading up to it).
 3. Our answer isn't an election outcome. Jesus is our answer. He's coming to take control of the kingdoms of this world and establish His government on earth. He'll do what no man can do: remove sin and make things as they were always intended to be. Isa 9:6; Rev 11:15-18
 3. As God's family we have hope. Our future is just beginning. No matter what happens, our best days are ahead first in Heaven and then on earth made new, the family home restored. This reality will help us deal more effectively with the challenges of life in increasingly troubling times.
- B. Part of our hope comes from looking at God's track record. The Bible is filled with examples of real people (fellow members of the family of God) who lived through political, social and economic upheaval brought on by government decisions. God got them through until He got them out. Rom 15:4
1. The Bible is fifty percent history. It is a written record of how God has worked in the affairs of men to accomplish His plan to have a family of sons and daughters with whom He can live on earth.
 - a. Gen 3:15--Right after Adam sinned God began to unveil His plan to undo the damage done. He promised the coming of a Redeemer, the Seed (Jesus) of the woman (Mary) who would free the family and the family home from sin, corruption and death.

- b. God chose a man named Abraham and his descendants as the people group through whom the Redeemer would come. They were charged with receiving, compiling and preserving the written record of redemption (what we know as the Old Testament). Rom 3:2; Rom 9:4
1. Through them God gave increasing revelations of the Redeemer (both His person and His work). These people were also charged with representing the Lord to the world around them because His number one goal is to gather His family.
 2. The Lord gave them the land of Canaan (modern day Israel) because it was a land bridge connecting three continents (Asia, Africa, Europe). International trade routes passed through the area giving them great opportunity to be lights of the One True God to the known world.
- c. These people eventually grew into a great nation under the leadership of two kings, David and his son Solomon. In the time of Solomon's son, Rehoboam, civil war broke out and the kingdom divided into a northern kingdom known as Israel and a southern kingdom known as Judah.
1. During this period these people went deep into idolatry and depravity. Twenty different kings ruled Israel. All were wicked. In Judah, out of twenty kings, only eight were godly. The kings set the tone for their nation and the people followed the leadership in and out of idolatry.
 2. This is a big deal. One, because they're supposed to show God to the world around them. Two, if knowledge of the True God gets wiped out, the plan of redemption would be thwarted. God's Word has already been spoken. Jesus is coming through a specific line in this nation.
- d. God had warned them before they settled in Canaan that if they abandoned Him to worship false gods, their enemies would overwhelm them and remove them from the land. Deut 4:23-28
1. Over 250 years God sent prophets to call them back to Him and to warn them of coming destruction at the hands of their enemies if they did not repent. Although a remnant remained faithful to God, most did not listen to the prophets.
 2. Consequently, in 722 B.C. Israel was overrun by Assyria. God's people were removed and scattered throughout the Assyrian Empire. In 586 B.C. Judah was conquered by the Babylonian Empire. Jerusalem and the Temple were burned to the ground and all but the poorest people were taken as captives back to Babylon.
2. Let's look briefly at two of God's prophets. They give us insight into having hope in the midst of upheaval and catastrophe: Habakkuk (ministered from 620-605 B.C.) and Jeremiah (625-585 B.C.)
- a. These two prophets were contemporaries sent to the southern kingdom at the end of its national existence. Israel had already been taken captive by Assyria and Babylon was coming for Judah.
 1. Both men served the Lord and faithfully carried out their charge to prophesy an unpopular message. Their country men rejected their messages and persisted in idol worship. These two men experienced all the resulting calamity that came on Judah—the destruction of the nation.
 2. From their writings we get insight into how they looked at their circumstances. Although they were grieved over what happened to their people and nation they had hope in the midst of it. They didn't like what happened and it was difficult to deal with. But they got through it.
 - b. Before destruction came God instructed Jeremiah to buy land in Judah because the Lord said men would one day live again in the land, an impossibility considering what was about to happen.
 1. Jer 32:6-15--Jeremiah did as instructed and praised the Lord—His bigness and faithfulness to keep His word—declaring that nothing is impossible for God (v16,17). The Lord spoke to Him again: You're right, Jeremiah. Nothing is too difficult for me (v26,27).
 2. We're all familiar with Jer 29:11--For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord. They are plans for good and not disaster, to give you a future and a hope (NLT). Note the context; v10--You're going to be captive in Babylon for seventy years then you'll return home.
 - A. However (if we do the math) anyone over twenty removed from Judah was probably not going back in their life time. If they lived that long they'd be too old for the return trip.
 - B. Where's the hope? It's in the fact that there's more to life than just this life. These people, including Jeremiah, expected to be raised from the dead to live on earth again.

They didn't have the details we have, but they had the hope. Job 19:25,26; Ps 37:11,29

3. This is not to minimize the challenges Jeremiah faced. He wrote the book of Lamentations just after the destruction of Jerusalem on Aug 10, 586 B.C. It's an expression of grief over the loss of the city and the Temple. Yet he had hope. Lam 3:19-24 (NLT)
 4. Jeremiah was given the choice of going to Babylon to honored for urging submission to them or remaining in Judah. He chose to stay but was taken captive by rebels still trying to fight Babylon. They took him to Egypt, looking for help. He died there about five years later.
- c. Note Habakkuk's response to the coming calamity that was going to alter life as he'd known it. Hab 3:17-19--This is a description of Judah's pitiful state following the destruction and exile.
 1. There would be no flourishing fig trees, no fruit on the vine and the olive crop would fail. The flocks would die in the field and the cattle barns be empty. Yet the prophet made a choice to rejoice or acknowledge and praise the Lord.
 2. This isn't an emotional response to his circumstances. It's a response based on the hope of what's ahead. His expression of hope or expectation of good brought him to a place of peace.
 3. We don't know what happened to this man in subsequent years but we know where he is now.
3. This present life is not unimportant. But it's not the most important part of our existence. The greater and better part is ahead, first in Heaven and then on the new earth. This hope lightens the load of life.
 - a. II Cor 4:17,18--In the context of his many potentially deadly trials, Paul called the difficulties he faced momentary and light in comparison to what awaits us in the life to come (Rom 8:18). Paul was familiar with all the history we discussed above. He wrote Rom 15:4.
 1. When you know this life is not your only shot at life on earth it changes your perspective. It helps you see that what happens in this life isn't as big a deal as it seems in the moment.
 2. Remember, Paul is the one who said we're more than conquerors in the face of tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril and sword (Rom 8:35-37). He testimony was: God delivers me out of all of this including the final one, physical death (II Tim 3:11; 4:18).
 - b. Rom 12:12--Paul wrote that we should rejoice in hope. Rejoice comes from a word that means to be "cheer"ful or full of cheer. Cheer is a state of mind, not a feel. When you cheer someone you encourage them with the reasons they can have hope or an expectation of coming good.
 1. Paul heeded his own council. In the context of the many trials he faced as he preached the gospel. He talked about being sorrowful yet rejoicing. II Cor 6:10
 2. We need to learn to respond rather than react as the pressure is turned up in this world. When you react the circumstance and the emotions generated by it drive your behavior. When you respond you answer it with the Word of God. God's Word determines your actions.
 - c. Praise in its most basic form is acknowledging God by talking about who He is and what He has done, is doing and will do. When you praise Him for what you can't yet see but believe—that's faith. In the context of the last days Peter said: We're kept by God's power through faith (I Pet 1:5). Praise is the voice of faith. Faith opens the door to God's help and power.
- C. These Old Testament accounts of real people who faced real problems and got real help from God—people who are part of the family of God in Heaven, our brothers and sisters—give us reason to hope because they show us how God works in the midst of life's hardships, using human choice, as He gather His family.
 1. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon removed the people of Judah from their land in three stages (606 BC, 596 BC, 586 BC). Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (princes of Judah) were taken in the first wave and groomed for government positions in Babylon.
 - a. Even though they were faithful to God, they were taken from their homeland because of wicked government decisions and corruption in the culture around them. In the land of their captivity they all had food, clothing and shelter. But they never went back home.
 - b. All faced pressure to abandon worship of the true God. Three were put in a furnace and one into a lion's pit (Dan 3; Dan 6). Their stance: God is able and will deliver us. But even if He doesn't

we won't bow in worship to anyone but God. That's the attitude of a conqueror. Rev 12:11

c. They knew there's more to life than just this life. While in Babylon Daniel was given much revelation about the coming kingdom of God on earth and their place in it. Dan 2:44; 7:27; etc.

2. Here's the point for us. We can look at these historical accounts and see how God worked His redemptive plan in the midst of human choices and events. The Lord used the actions of wicked men (ungodly rulers in Judah, Babylon and Persia who replaced Babylon) to further His plan for a family.

a. The years in Babylon cured the people of Israel of idol worship. It never happened again. God preserved the people group through whom the Redeemer would come. When Israel returned to Canaan the tribe of Judah and family of David were intact. (lessons for another day)

b. For those who served the Lord but didn't live long enough to go home, they're in Heaven awaiting their return to earth and their homeland. No one in Heaven is crying about the hardships of life.

c. Through Israel's years in captivity the light of the One True God was brought to the heathen land of Babylon (which became Persia). There are people in Heaven who responded to this testimony and the light brought to them through God's faithful people in captivity. Dan 3:28-30; Dan 6:25-28

3. The Bible gives us great insight into what our attitude should be as we see and are affected by choices made by people with whom we don't agree. God gives us instructions to help us navigate through it.

a. Jeremiah 29:11 is actually a line from a letter the Lord instructed the prophet to write from Jerusalem to his fellow countrymen who had been exiled to Babylon (v1-23).

b. Note something else God told the people of Israel. He didn't tell them to use their faith and try to pray it all away. He told them to build homes, settle down, live their lives and: Work for the peace and prosperity of Babylon. Pray to the Lord for that city where you are held captive, for if Babylon has peace, so will you (v7, NLT)

c. This sound like what Paul told Christians living in the Roman Empire. I Tim 2:1-4--Pray for those in authority so we can live peaceful lives. Note it's connected to men coming to saving knowledge of Jesus. The gospel goes forth more readily when there is peace in the land.

1. If you aren't happy with our new president and/or afraid of what he's going to do, pray for him. What if, when the enormity of the responsibility he is about to assume hits him, it drives him to his knees and he gets gloriously saved?

2. Pray for the losing candidate. She has suffered a devastating loss and rejection. Her political career is over. What is this brings her to her knees and she too gets saved?

3. Pray for laborers to come into the lives of those protesting the election results. Some of them may be more open to real answers that transcend the angst of this moment in time.

c. Above all, acknowledge God. Make a choice to praise Him and encourage yourself with the reasons you have hope no matter what's happening around you.

D. Conclusion: None of this is bigger than God. He is able to use human choice, causing it to serve His purposes as He gathers His family. He'll get us through until He gets us out. A little more next week!