

# A TRUE HOPE

JEREMIAH 52:31-34 JUNE 27, 2020

Five years after Richard Nixon left the Washington D.C. in “tears and disgrace,” something remarkable happened. He received an invitation to attend a formal, state dinner at the White House as a guest of President Carter, to welcome Deng Xiaoping, who was coming on the first official visit of a leader of China to the U.S.<sup>1</sup> Nixon, of course, had been instrumental in the two countries’ diplomatic relations. After all, “Only Nixon could go to China.”<sup>2</sup> But now, given the circumstances, who would’ve expected the former president to be brought back “with all the pomp and dignity a presidency can offer?”<sup>3</sup>

At the time, people speculated about how Nixon felt about it all. It’s hard to consider all the thoughts and emotions that would’ve been on his mind that night. Coming “to a stop, momentarily, atop the stairs of the North Portico...just before [entering], a reporter asked him how it felt to be returning. His response, spoken softly, had little to do with the question. ‘I’m here as a guest of President and Mrs. Carter. I look forward to seeing them again. I don’t want to comment on anything else,’ he said.”<sup>4</sup>

Invitations like that aren’t common in political history, especially when your opponent is the one in power.

In the closing sentences of Jeremiah we have a similar story that’s even more extensive and astounding. It’s so unexpected because of the long chapters that precede it. It’s no surprise that a book whose musical soundtrack is *Lamentations* doesn’t have a lot of bright spots in it. Jeremiah is passage after passage of the failure of God’s people to believe and repent and turn to the Lord. The last section of the book, in particular, catalog the fall of the nation, the destruction of Jerusalem and the miserable, last-ditch efforts of the remnant to wriggle out of the judgment of God, only to be met by crushing blows. The tragedy is complete. But then, on the very last page we’re given four verses of hope. Hope that had been predicted by God through Jeremiah long before, but still astonishing when it arrives.

This portrait of hope stimulates us as readers to remember what’s still to come for our own lives and the world around us. And, when we find ourselves in times of confusion, difficulty, and defeat, it’s the true hope of God’s grace that we must remember, cling to and fill our hearts with.

**Jeremiah 52:31 - <sup>31</sup> On the twenty-fifth day of the twelfth month of the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Judah’s King Jehoiachin, King Evil-merodach of Babylon, in the first year of his reign, pardoned King Jehoiachin of Judah and released him from prison.**

Jehoiachin became king at age 18. He reigned for about 100 days when he was forced to surrender to Nebuchadnezzar and was taken to Babylon. He was imprisoned there for 37 years. All of Judea had been destroyed. The Temple was gone. The gold, the bronze, the people, all of it was gone.

Growing up, Jehoiachin would’ve had all the time he needed to think about his fate and how things had gone so wrong for God’s people. The prophets had been active. God’s word was still available.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deng\\_Xiaoping%27s\\_1979\\_visit\\_to\\_the\\_United\\_States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deng_Xiaoping%27s_1979_visit_to_the_United_States)

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nixon\\_goes\\_to\\_China#In\\_popular\\_culture](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nixon_goes_to_China#In_popular_culture)

<sup>3</sup> Martin Schram *The Washington Post: The Return of Richard Nixon*

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

And yet, we're told in 2 Kings he did what was evil in the Lord's sight. Now, here he was, in the hopeless filth of a Babylonian dungeon, year after year, decade after decade.

But then, one day, a messenger came. Nebuchadnezzar's son had given a pardon. In truth, it wasn't just "one" day, but a very *specific* day. We see in verse 31 that God had been keeping count. The 25th day of the 12th month of the 37th year. I'm guessing Jehoiachin had long ago stopped making scratches on the wall of his cell. But God hadn't. He is mindful of every occurrence of every hour of every day of your life. He sees and knows and has bent His thoughts and affections toward you.

**Psalm 139:17-18a - <sup>17</sup> God, how precious your thoughts are to me; how vast their sum is! <sup>18</sup> If I counted them, they would outnumber the grains of sand;**

In election years, candidates work hard to come across as people who care about "the little guy." They make pledges to watch out for those they call "working class" and "average Americans." The terms themselves betray what these politicians *really* think of the electorate. But, even if they are well-meaning about the citizens they represent, no fallible human can know how some of their decisions will negatively impact people. How could they keep track of such a thing?

But the Bible makes it very clear that God is ever-mindful of *all* the suffering of *all* the people of this earth. And He has made it His business to bring relief and redemption. He is *not* the author of our suffering. Look at Jehoiachin. He found himself in a Babylonian dungeon because of his wickedness and his nation's refusal to accept God's mercy. But God had still not forgotten him. Even for a crooked king like this God had grace. And the prison gates swung open. But that was just the start.

**Jeremiah 52:32 - <sup>32</sup> He [Evil-merodach] spoke kindly to him [Jehoiachin] and set his throne above the thrones of the kings who were with him in Babylon.**

Though guilty, the Jewish king had received a pardon. But then he was also given a throne, a place of honor and respect, in the court of the greatest empire on the planet at the time. Jehoiachin had no reason to expect such treatment. But look at what God was able to do: He was able to use a Babylonian king to show compassion and favor. Merodach, it seems, was *genuine* in his actions toward Jehoiachin. He spoke with kindness. He kept him in mind. He made it his business to grant him gifts and positions that Jehoiachin, as a conquered foreigner, had absolutely no claim to.

The analogy for us is direct. While we shudder to compare our matchless King Jesus to someone as base as Evil-Merodach, we can't help but be reminded of the astonishing work of grace that Christ has accomplished on our behalf. We, who were in all ways guilty, we who were held captive by sin, were granted a full pardon though the personal work of the King, who paid the cost that we might not only be set free, but then given a place in His great Kingdom. He has thrones set out for His people, allowing us to rule and reign with Him in His Kingdom. We have no reason to expect such kindness. We have no right to claim such a position. But this is what God has done for us. Coming as light into the darkness of our sin so that we wouldn't have to stay there but instead be rescued and transformed.

**Jeremiah 52:33 - <sup>33</sup> So Jehoiachin changed his prison clothes, and he dined regularly in the presence of the king of Babylon for the rest of his life.**

It's explained in 2 Kings 25 that Evil-Merodach gave him these new clothes. And so we see that he wasn't being brought out to be made sport of or to be mocked. In Judges 1 we learn about a king

named Adoni-Bezek who had 70 kings who begged for scraps under his table. He had cut off all of their big toes and their thumbs and was entertained by their hardship. That's not what was happening to Jehoiachin.

But he also isn't being treated the way Pharaoh treated Joseph back in Genesis 41. Joseph was installed in power by the grace of God, but from *Pharaoh's* perspective, Joseph had something to offer. He was going to be instrumental in the administration of Egypt. Jehoiachin offers nothing, yet receives liberty, a throne, new clothes, and feasting in the presence of the king for the rest of his life.

This is a pale comparison of the hope we have in Christ. We are bankrupt before Him. We add nothing to His power or His splendor. But it pleases Him to bless us. To give us a robe of righteousness. To give us thrones and crowns in His Kingdom. To feast with us in eternity. To allow us to be in His presence for the rest of our everlasting lives.

Presidential pardons are always interesting news. It's a rare gift to have the highest office in the land wipe your slate clean. But, when people are pardoned, they don't then become members of the president's cabinet. He doesn't then *adopt* them as sons. The more we ponder on God's grace, the more astounding it is. He is the most kind, the most compassionate, the most generous Person to ever exist.

**Jeremiah 52:34 - <sup>34</sup>As for his allowance, a regular allowance was given to him by the king of Babylon, a portion for each day until the day of his death, for the rest of his life.**

The Lord was not only showing the power of His mercy, but also he was showing His great faithfulness. Back in Jeremiah 31, God had promised that, despite the guilt of His people, despite their refusal to obey, despite all the judgment that would have to be poured out as a result, *one day* restoration would come. One day, God would make a *new* covenant with them and remember their sins no more. And movements of God's grace like we see here in chapter 52 are simply down payments on what God has promised. He will not forget, He will not withhold, He will not fail to do all that He has promised for us and our families and this world.

We still look forward to that time of final restoration, when God brings to completion all that He has been working on these thousands of years. It's coming. It's a *true* hope. If we find ourselves in some dark cell of suffering we can be sure of what God will do. Why doesn't relief come sooner? Why doesn't help come today instead of tomorrow? God's ways are often beyond finding out. But we can be sure that He will do what He has promised and that He *is* working, even now, to accomplish His great purposes. Right now, in this moment, God is busy concerning Himself with your life. From the breaths you're taking<sup>5</sup> to the good works He prepared before the foundation of the world, inviting you discover and walk in, to the ultimate finish of your faith, when you step into eternity to receive an everlasting reward in His presence. God is busy accomplishing these and more in the individual lives of each of His children.

But, since that is true, why is there still so much difficulty? Why does God seem to move so slowly in some situations? Even considering Jehoiachin we think: "Once Nebuchadnezzar turned his heart over to the Lord, why didn't *he* free these prisoners?" We don't know. Jehoiachin would have to wait 37 years before these gifts were given to him.

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<sup>5</sup> Job 27:3, 33:4

We may have to wait much longer, but that is acceptable because know what is coming. Liberation from sin and suffering. Glorious feasting in the presence of Almighty God. It's a sure thing. We can join with Paul and say,

**Romans 8:18 - <sup>18</sup> For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us.**

Matthew Henry wrote: "Though the night of affliction be very long, yet we must not despair, [for] the day [will] dawn at last."

There are a lot of possible reasons why President Carter decided to bring Nixon back to the White House - a choice that was sure to offend many people. One suggestion is that it would be a political move to silence conservative critics at the time. It's also reported that Carter initially *refused* the idea of having Nixon at the dinner, but that Deng Xiaoping said that if he wasn't brought in, he would simply travel to California to meet with Nixon there.<sup>6</sup>

God's plan to work His grace and mercy in our lives has no such political motivation. He blesses us out of love. It is His love that motivates His actions and His long-suffering, His providence and His constant efforts. But these gifts of grace, forgiveness and salvation must be received in order to be effective in your life. God will not force you to receive His love or to love Him back.

Did you know that, in 1833, a man named George Wilson received a pardon from President Andrew Jackson. But, amazingly, he *refused* it. People didn't know what to do. And so the case had to be taken up by the Supreme Court, who ruled that a person cannot have a pardon forced upon him, rather it must be freely accepted. And so, while records aren't 100% clear, it seems that he hung for his crimes. It was a completely needless waste of a life.

If you've never been born again, you are imprisoned in your sin and your sentence is an eternity in hell. You may not feel the weight of your guilt today, but the Bible explains very clearly that the wages of sin is death. That no one comes to the Father except through Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins that we might be saved and washed clean and reconciled to God. He is the gift the rescues us from hell, from this present evil age, and transforms us from the inside out.

Won't you receive His pardon today? You can, right now, and it's very simple. It is by grace you are saved, through faith. If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. If you will believe on Jesus, you will not perish but receive everlasting life. You can do it right now where you're sitting. In the quiet of your heart call out to God and ask Him to save you and allow Him to accomplish that rescue work He's so desperate to do in your life.

For those of us who *are* saved today, how might Jehoiachin's story speak to us? Most of all, it should cause us to fill our hearts with thoughts of how great and loving our God is. Often, we're quick to read a passage and think, "What do I need to *do* to be better?" But it is more important to simply meditate on who our God is and what He has done. When we do that, it causes our hearts and minds to fill of up with thankfulness and praise and appreciation and devotion. It causes us to press into Him and trust Him more and more. That's what God wants. From there, *God* is the One who transforms our lives and our thinking and gives us directions and opportunities.

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<sup>6</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deng\\_Xiaoping%27s\\_1979\\_visit\\_to\\_the\\_United\\_States#State\\_dinner](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deng_Xiaoping%27s_1979_visit_to_the_United_States#State_dinner)

In the opening chapter of Ephesians, Paul reminds us of all that God has done for us. It has many parallels to these verses in Jeremiah 52. He talks about how God has lifted us up, rescued us, lavished incredible spiritual riches on us, and given us a new inheritance.

As a result, Paul says that this is what he desires for the Ephesians (and all other Christians by extension): That they would understand more the wealth of our glorious inheritance in Christ, that we would know what is the hope of His calling and that we would walk in it. Meaning, that we believe God and follow Him, receiving the extravagant gifts of grace, forgiveness, strength, peace and testimony He wants to bestow. That, like Jehoiachin, we would walk out of the darkness of sin and bring ourselves to the King's table and spend our lives in His presence. That for the rest of our lives we enjoy the portion He's offered us and pledge ourselves to serve Him, enjoy Him, praise Him and honor Him in whatever ways we can. That our lives would be beacons of heaven's hope. A true hope, one that changes everything and is ready to be received today.