

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church / November 1, 2020 / Pastor Jeff Harrison  
Jeremiah: Faithful Sermon Series  
**Faithful Hope** (Jeremiah 32)

### **We sometimes face circumstances that feel hopeless**

This is the time of year that people are thinking about politics. In some churches, pastors speak openly about that and even campaign for a party, while in churches like ours, we don't. But with the election Tuesday, I do want to say one thing about Democrats and one thing about Republicans as we get started. I want you to know that I have tried both the Democrat and the Republican tacos at Torchy's, and that both are delicious. 😊

Now I know for some that politics are very serious business, and that depending on Tuesday's outcome, you may be tempted to feel hopeless. Even if you're not that politically minded, we all eventually face circumstances that feel hopeless. Sometimes I already lose hope when circumstances just might turn out poorly. So let's pray about that and then look to God's Word for help...

I have a relative with special needs. For a few decades they've tried many therapies and medications, and I've personally prayed for them a lot.

And with those prayers and efforts some things have improved, but there are also still limitations that probably aren't ever going away that make aspects of life really hard. And when life is so hard for you or someone you love, without really hope for improvement, it's hard to just function, let alone respond well. I sure could use help responding more hopefully when circumstances feel hopeless, and I bet you could too.

### **Orienting to God's Word: Jeremiah 32 speaks to circumstances that look hopeless**

If anyone knows about circumstances looking hopeless, it's the prophet Jeremiah. So if you've got a Bible or Bible app, open to Old Testament book of Jeremiah, chapter 32. If not, no worries, we'll have the verses on the screen. If you're new to reading the Bible, the big numbers are chapter numbers, and the little numbers are verse numbers.

Jeremiah was born about 650 years before Jesus, after the nation of Israel had split into two kingdoms. Throughout Jeremiah's life, despite decades of reform efforts, the leaders and people of Judah ignore Jeremiah.

They are described as a people of continuous evil: acting violently, slandering, swearing falsely, cheating on their spouses, oppressing the poor, engaging in dark worship with idols, cult prostitutes, dark magic, and even burning their own children alive as offerings.

After about 80 straight years<sup>1</sup> of this evil, including a couple of decades of stubbornly ignoring God's repeated warnings through Jeremiah, God disciplines Judah. He allows the Babylonian army, led by King Nebuchadnezzar, to invade Judah in about 605BC and then again seven years later. Babylon plunders Judah, exiles most of its leaders, and appoints a new king.

### **Teaching: In Jeremiah and Baruch's seemingly hopeless circumstances...**

God calls Jeremiah to hopeful action – And then in chapter 32, things get even more hopeless, starting in verse 1. **(1-5)**

32 This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD in the tenth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar. <sup>2</sup>The army of the king of Babylon was then besieging Jerusalem, and Jeremiah the prophet was confined in the courtyard of the guard in the royal palace of Judah. <sup>3</sup>Now Zedekiah king of Judah had imprisoned him there, saying, "Why do you prophesy as you do? You say, 'This is what the LORD says: I am about to give this city into the hands of the king of Babylon, and he will capture it. <sup>4</sup>Zedekiah king of Judah will not escape the Babylonians but will certainly be given into the hands of the king of Babylon, and will speak with him face to face and see him with his own eyes. <sup>5</sup>He will take Zedekiah to Babylon, where he will remain until I deal with him, declares the LORD. If you fight against the Babylonians, you will not succeed.'"

Here in chapter 32, we're now up to almost 100 straight years of evil and Babylon is still in charge. Rather than repent and seek God's mercy, Judah tries to reverse God's discipline themselves by teaming with the Egyptians against the Babylonians.

Long story short, it doesn't work. The Egyptians flee, and now in verse 2 the mighty Babylonian army is right outside Jerusalem. They surround the city for months, cutting it off from help and supplies as everyone inside suffers.

Yet there is still no repentance. In verse 3 King Zedekiah even has the nerve to ask Jeremiah, "Why do you prophesy as you do?" As if Jeremiah hasn't been warning them for

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<sup>1</sup> From start of King Manasseh's reign (excluding coregency) until first Babylonian invasion in 605BC.

decades about the consequences of continuing in evil. To add insult to injury, Zedekiah confines Jeremiah to his soldiers' courtyard for speaking out.

For the rest of the message, let's imagine that you're Jeremiah's scribe and close friend, Baruch, visiting Jeremiah in his current confinement. You, Baruch, have seen Jeremiah faithfully serve God for decades, yet the people never listened, and now doomsday is about here.

You hear the sounds outside the walls of the city. The Babylonians banging at the gate and building earthen ramps to get over the gate, and you know that within weeks they will come in to plunder, kill, and march the survivors into forced exile. All hope is gone.

Perhaps you don't have to imagine too hard to identify as Baruch here. Maybe today you hear an enemy banging at your gate, and you're tempted to lose hope. Perhaps, like the people of Judah, you've done wrong, and you're now suffering hard consequences for that.

Or maybe you've done nothing wrong, yet an enemy bangs at your gate. Like say you or your loved one's degenerative condition just keeps getting worse, and you're starting to feel hopeless about life.

Whatever it is, maybe you've prayed and asked others to pray and you've pursued all the help and strategies you can, and yet the circumstances still keep getting worse. You feel hopeless as the enemy bangs at your gate.

In those dark times, it's good to lament to God about it, to shed tears and to cry out to Him. We quoted from Lamentations this morning, which is a whole book about lamenting this judgment and exile of these people of Judah. So it's good to lament to God when you feel hopeless. But in this specific moment, God leads Jeremiah instead to take an unbelievably hopeful action, starting in verse 6. **(6-8b)**

<sup>6</sup> Jeremiah said, "The word of the LORD came to me: <sup>7</sup> Hanamel son of Shallum your uncle is going to come to you and say, 'Buy my field at Anathoth, because as nearest relative it is your right and duty to buy it.' <sup>8</sup> "Then, just as the LORD had said, my cousin Hanamel came to me in the courtyard of the guard and said, 'Buy my field at Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin. Since it is your right to redeem it and possess it, buy it for yourself.'

The Old Testament book of Leviticus<sup>2</sup> says that if a family member gets into financial trouble and has to sell their land, then the nearest male relative is to redeem the land so it doesn't

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<sup>2</sup> Chapter 25.

pass out of the extended family. The relative who pays to redeem the land can farm it for some years, after which the land goes back to the original owner or their descendants.

Normally, it's totally fine for an impoverished family member to ask the nearest relative to redeem the land, and it's good for that relative to redeem it if able, like Boaz does in the Old Testament book of Ruth.

But in these circumstances, this is an audacious request by Jeremiah's cousin. Anathoth is a few miles from Jerusalem, so it's likely the Babylonian army is currently camping on the land Jeremiah is asked to redeem, plundering all its produce, and planning to burn it to the ground once they take Jerusalem.

As Jeremiah is now confined and facing likely exile, it looks like he'll probably never see this land again. And Jeremiah is single, so he has no hope of his kids one day returning to use the land years later. So this is a terrible deal, and Jeremiah will likely be mocked if he does it.

If that's not enough, back in chapters 11 and 12 of Jeremiah, his relatives from Anathoth were plotting a way to kill Jeremiah to silence his uncomfortable message of judgment.

So Baruch, how are you feeling about your friend Jeremiah's murderous, manipulative cousin here? I bet you're ready to hear Jeremiah tell him off, to bring some prophetic thunder. Let's see what Jeremiah does in the middle of verse 8. **(8c-15)**

"I knew that this was the word of the LORD;<sup>9</sup> so I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel and weighed out for him seventeen shekels of silver.<sup>10</sup> I signed and sealed the deed, had it witnessed, and weighed out the silver on the scales.<sup>11</sup> I took the deed of purchase—the sealed copy containing the terms and conditions, as well as the unsealed copy—<sup>12</sup> and I gave this deed to Baruch son of Neriah, the son of Mahseiah, in the presence of my cousin Hanamel and of the witnesses who had signed the deed and of all the Jews sitting in the courtyard of the guard.<sup>13</sup> "In their presence I gave Baruch these instructions:<sup>14</sup> 'This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Take these documents, both the sealed and unsealed copies of the deed of purchase, and put them in a clay jar so they will last a long time.<sup>15</sup> For this is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Houses, fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land.'

You're shocked to see your friend and leader Jeremiah agree to this foolish purchase in such a hopeless situation. Your bewilderment only growing as you watch Jeremiah also make a public display about ensuring the documents for the sale are preserved, as if that paperwork is

going to be of any use. Documents Jeremiah then hands to you as he instructs you to place them in a clay jar so they last for years to come. You're just bewildered.

Though God gives Jeremiah a message in verses 14 and 15 about why He led Jeremiah to purchase the land, even Jeremiah himself is bewildered about God having him take such a hopeful action as the enemy bangs at the gate.

It takes courage to obey God when things look so hopeless. It's easier to languish in despair, since despair sees the hopeless circumstances right in front of us, while hope requires seeing with eyes of faith that God is still at work even as all looks lost.

*Jeremiah asks God, "Why?"* – To your leader Jeremiah's credit, he obeys in faith, even as he's bewildered, straining to try to see with eyes of faith. So Jeremiah later asks God "Why?" starting in verse 16. And you can't wait to hear God's answer. **(16-25)**

<sup>16</sup>“After I had given the deed of purchase to Baruch son of Neriah, I prayed to the LORD:  
<sup>17</sup>“Ah, Sovereign LORD, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you. <sup>18</sup>You show love to thousands but bring the punishment for the parents' sins into the laps of their children after them. Great and mighty God, whose name is the LORD Almighty, <sup>19</sup>great are your purposes and mighty are your deeds. Your eyes are open to the ways of all mankind; you reward each person according to their conduct and as their deeds deserve. <sup>20</sup>You performed signs and wonders in Egypt and have continued them to this day, in Israel and among all mankind, and have gained the renown that is still yours. <sup>21</sup>You brought your people Israel out of Egypt with signs and wonders, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with great terror. <sup>22</sup>You gave them this land you had sworn to give their ancestors, a land flowing with milk and honey. <sup>23</sup>They came in and took possession of it, but they did not obey you or follow your law; they did not do what you commanded them to do. So you brought all this disaster on them. <sup>24</sup>“See how the siege ramps are built up to take the city. Because of the sword, famine and plague, the city will be given into the hands of the Babylonians who are attacking it. What you said has happened, as you now see. <sup>25</sup>And though the city will be given into the hands of the Babylonians, you, Sovereign LORD, say to me, ‘Buy the field with silver and have the transaction witnessed.’”

In these verses Jeremiah reflects on God's blessings to Israel and Judah for hundreds of years, despite the people's frequent disobedience.

Jeremiah knows that God’s heart is to bless and that He reluctantly brings discipline. That’s why in verse 18 your leader describes God as wanting to bless goodness to a thousand generations while in contrast only the current generation and next suffers discipline consequences. But tragically, the people of Judah have been sinking so low for so long while being so stubbornly resistant to God’s warnings, that God brings severe discipline.

Jeremiah sees why God is disciplining. What Jeremiah wrestles with is why, as an enemy bangs at the gate, that God tells Jeremiah to take the ridiculously hopeful action of redeeming the field and instructing you Baruch to preserve the documents.

Maybe Jeremiah has trouble fathoming God showing these people favor on the other side of this discipline. Or maybe, though Jeremiah says in verse 17 that nothing is too hard for God, maybe Jeremiah is having a moment of doubt about whether even God could restore such a wicked people’s fortunes.

*God shares about His discipline and His hopeful future* – Whatever is going on inside Jeremiah, starting in verse 26, God responds. **(26-27)**

<sup>26</sup>Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: <sup>27</sup>“I am the LORD, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?”

In verse 27 God reminds Jeremiah that He is the LORD, the God of all, and so nothing is too hard for Him, even starting to redeem in the midst of judgment and even restoring the hearts and fortunes of such a rebellious people. But before God spells that out, He confirms Jeremiah’s perspective on the people’s evil and God’s judgment, starting in verse 28. **(28-35)**

<sup>28</sup>Therefore this is what the LORD says: I am about to give this city into the hands of the Babylonians and to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, who will capture it. <sup>29</sup>The Babylonians who are attacking this city will come in and set it on fire; they will burn it down, along with the houses where the people aroused my anger by burning incense on the roofs to Baal and by pouring out drink offerings to other gods. <sup>30</sup>“The people of Israel and Judah have done nothing but evil in my sight from their youth; indeed, the people of Israel have done nothing but arouse my anger with what their hands have made, declares the LORD. <sup>31</sup>From the day it was built until now, this city has so aroused my anger and wrath that I must remove it from my sight. <sup>32</sup>The people of Israel and Judah have provoked me by all the evil they have done—they, their kings and officials, their priests and prophets, the people of Judah and those living in Jerusalem.

<sup>33</sup> They turned their backs to me and not their faces; though I taught them again and again, they would not listen or respond to discipline. <sup>34</sup> They set up their vile images in the house that bears my Name and defiled it. <sup>35</sup> They built high places for Baal in the Valley of Ben Hinnom to sacrifice their sons and daughters to Molek, though I never commanded—nor did it enter my mind—that they should do such a detestable thing and so make Judah sin.

These verses show that Judah is filled with evil and false worship. They've turned their backs to God over and over, becoming so depraved they even sacrifice their own children.

Many today have trouble with God disciplining sin, but when evil continues to provoke God by destroying what God holds so precious, over and over and over, God eventually acts to oppose that evil. But even when God brings severe discipline, don't miss that His heart is to restore, which we see starting in verse 36, where God helps Jeremiah, and you Baruch, to understand the instruction to redeem the land. And notice all the times that God says, "I will" in red. Verse 36: **(36-44)**

<sup>36</sup> "You are saying about this city, 'By the sword, famine and plague it will be given into the hands of the king of Babylon'; but this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: <sup>37</sup> I will surely gather them from all the lands where I banish them in my furious anger and great wrath; I will bring them back to this place and let them live in safety. <sup>38</sup> They will be my people, and I will be their God. <sup>39</sup> I will give them singleness of heart and action, so that they will always fear me and that all will then go well for them and for their children after them. <sup>40</sup> I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them, and I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from me. <sup>41</sup> I will rejoice in doing them good and will assuredly plant them in this land with all my heart and soul. <sup>42</sup> "This is what the LORD says: As I have brought all this great calamity on this people, so I will give them all the prosperity I have promised them. <sup>43</sup> Once more fields will be bought in this land of which you say, 'It is a desolate waste, without people or animals, for it has been given into the hands of the Babylonians.'

<sup>44</sup> Fields will be bought for silver, and deeds will be signed, sealed and witnessed in the territory of Benjamin, in the villages around Jerusalem, in the towns of Judah and in the towns of the hill country, of the western foothills and of the Negev, because I will restore their fortunes, declares the LORD."

Verse 36 is the warning of judgment that Jeremiah has faithfully shared for decades. But now that it's here, starting in verse 37, God has something new for Jeremiah to declare: a future hope.

That's because God's heart is for His discipline to be corrective and restorative, to prepare the people to receive more of God and His good ways. So God makes shockingly hopeful promises in these verses. Like to restore the people to the land, and let them live in safety, and be their God in everlasting covenant, and help them to have His heart and way and to obey, and give them all the prosperity He promised.

God tells Jeremiah to redeem the land and preserve the documents to create, as one author describes it, a "prophetic signpost". Jeremiah's public action redeeming the field showing you Baruch and the people that even as you hear the enemy banging at the gate, God is also still here, and is creating a hopeful future beyond the judgment.

Jeremiah sure didn't redeem the land on the advice of his financial advisor or to look good before others. No, he buys the land with eyes of faith as he obeys God's hopeful leading even when all evidence points to the contrary. God using Jeremiah's courageous obedience to help you Baruch and the people to see with eyes of faith the future that God is creating, when fields will be bought again in the land.

In verses 37-44 God points to a very hopeful future. These promises are partially fulfilled when the exiles return from Babylon and rebuild Jerusalem and buy and sell land 70 years later. But this hopeful future will only be fully fulfilled in the New Creation.

Thank God that this future does not ultimately rest on the ancient people of Judah, or on us, learning to stop messing up the blessing for ourselves and for others. No, it rests on God's gracious work. Notice how many times God says "I will" in verses 37-44 there in red text on the screen.

### **Next Step**

It's because God is the one creating the hopeful future. On this side of the cross, we better understand how God can promise such a hopeful future to such a flawed people back then, as well as to flawed people like us today. Gentiles who have been grafted into God's New Covenant promises through faith in Jesus.



In Jeremiah's day, God's righteous judgment was poured out through violent enemies. But on the cross, through the violence of enemies, God's Son took all the righteous judgment for us.

In love, taking the judgment we deserve in love so that He could forgive us all our sins, give us His Spirit to help us obey, and one day end all the evil in this world without having to end us, healing every broken thing inside of us and filling us with His splendor. That's our hopeful future in Jesus.

So like Jeremiah, no matter what enemy you hear banging at the gate, we can also see with eyes of faith the future God is creating. Hope not because our earthly circumstances will get better, because they may not. Rather, hope because God is with us and is working even in those circumstances, and because we share in God's hope filled future. That's what we're to see, with eyes of faith. And that's our next step this morning, to see with eyes of faith the future God is creating.

Imagine you're Baruch again, in a besieged city, hearing a terrifying enemy banging at the gate, and then you see Jeremiah act in hopeful courage as he takes his silver and pays to redeem the land and then hands you the purchase documents to preserve in a clay jar.

As you take the documents, even in your confusion, struggle, and pain, even though it looks so impractical, may you join your leader in having eyes of faith to see that God is still at work, creating something beautiful that is not yet visible. Eyes of faith that see not only how hopeless circumstances seem now but also see God's dreams for how it will be in glory.

To paraphrase author Christopher Wright, let us see, with eyes of faith, the vision of an everlasting covenant that's already been paid for, not with Jeremiah's silver, but with the very blood of Jesus, who then rose from the dead, not merely to restore some land to Judah, but as the first fruits of a whole new creation. This is the future God is creating, the "real estate" to which God holds the title deeds.<sup>3</sup>

So Baruch, as you place the purchase documents in your clay jar, may you join Jeremiah, even as all sounds hopeless, and see with eyes of faith the future God is creating. To help us all see, we're going to sing a song of praise as we prepare to take the Lord's Supper together. Now let's pray...

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<sup>3</sup> Christopher Wright, *The Message of Jeremiah*, 351.