

Today we are beginning a new series on Hope. As we've already announced our annual Day of Hope is coming up on September 16, and you hear me say it all the time as we plan and prepare throughout the year that it's our favorite day of the year. I hear it from you all that it's your favorite day too. It's the day that we invite our neighbors to come and be our guests here at Carbondale. We share stories, and groceries, we give shoes and haircuts, we share a meal together and smile together in the portrait area and pray together, but mostly we share hope with those that come. I suppose we could call this a Day of Giving or a Day of Receiving or a Day of Sharing, Caring, Blessing or even a Friend's Day or a Special Guest Day. All of that would be true to some degree. But, we don't call it that. We call it a Day of Hope partly because it incorporates who we are as a church – **(put up our church logo on the screen)** a place of Healing, HOPE, Laughter and Peace. So, if we're going to go to all the effort and invite our neighbors to be our guests and emphasize Hope then maybe we should talk about Hope for a few weeks. Maybe we should make sure we know what it is, who it's for, and how we share it, and we'll discover those answers in the coming weeks.

To start defining Hope it's probably helpful to say what we don't mean. Today when I say hope I don't simply mean it's a wish that I have. Hope you have a great day. It's the sort of thing you write in a yearbook. I went back and looked at my High School year books – 9 out of 10 yearbook entries use the word hope. I hope we stay friends – nope didn't happen, hope we don't lose touch with each other – does Facebook count? Hope you have a great year. Hope you stay the same – really? I *hope* we've all changed since high school! Stay sweet, don't ever change, hope you have a great

summer. It's a wish, and it is A definition, but it's not THE definition of hope we're using.

When we talk about hope we are talking about expectation of a future event or the obtained desire or fulfillment of that which you are hoping. Hope can also mean trust and that use is found often in scripture. Hope and trust were used interchangeably at times. The Psalmist told Israel to put her hope in the Lord – it's a similar idea to put your trust in the Lord. A scriptural definition of hope would be to trust in, wait for, look for, or expect something or someone good in the future. Hope, as we will talk about it is always looking forward towards something better or greater.

Psalm 119 has at least 5 verses telling us the Psalmist has put his hope in God's word. I too think we find hope in God's word. So, rather than give further definitions and explanations of what hope is let me tell you a story from God's word – because I love stories – I feel like Buddy the Elf – stories are my favorite. We'll let the story define hope for us this morning.

In the book of Jeremiah, who was a prophet during the time that the last of the people of Israel were taken into captivity, we find a nation in need of hope. The quick back story to how the people of Israel ended up living as captives in a foreign country is that early on in their years as a nation they begged and pleaded for a king so they could be like all the others nations. God gave them one. He wasn't fabulous so God anointed a different king, David. David was said to be a man after God's own heart. In 2 Samuel 7 God makes a promise to King David that He will make David's name great and establish a house for him saying, **"When your days are over and**

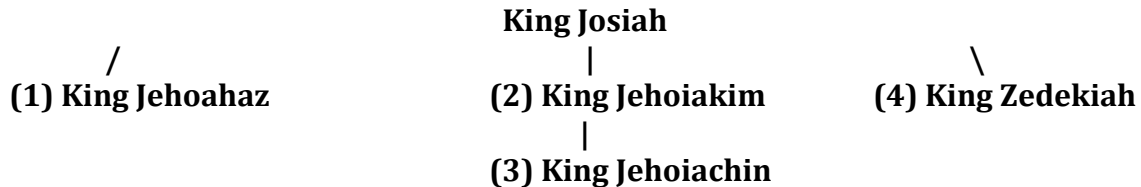
you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom...my love will never be taken away from him...your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.” 2 Samuel 7:11-16

That’s a really important part to this story. If you can only remember one thing from this story remember that piece and let all the other details wander out of your brain. Ok, fast forward and David dies, as you do, and David’s son, Solomon, becomes king but later in life allows his heart to be led astray from God. As a result God takes part of the kingdom from his son. Because of the promise he made to David – that’s the bit you’re supposed to keep remembering – he didn’t take the whole kingdom away just 10 of the tribes which were the descendants of Jacob who had his name changed to Israel. Don’t get confused – focus on the part you’re remembering – a house will be established and a king from David will reign forever and ever. Let that stick cause it’ll lead to hope.

Here’s what you need to know about all the rest of the kings – the ones over Israel were all bad and the ones that inherited through David’s line were a mixed bag of bad and those who loved God and tried to serve Him. The bad outweighed the good and God is a God of justice and He called the people to repent and they would for a short while and then they would serve false gods. Finally God says through the prophets I’m going to let you be taken captive and carried off from this land that I gave your fathers and grandfathers. They lived with the knowledge that exile and captivity was coming for quite a while, because God’s prophets kept saying it would be so, but it was a long time in coming and the people thought perhaps they had

gotten away with their sin. But, that's not possible. Sin and its consequences will always catch up to you. Israel's 10 tribes were taken first while Judah, the part that still had kings that came from David was left a while longer.

That brings us back to Jeremiah. But, don't forget your other main detail – about a king from David ruling forever. At the time that Jeremiah the prophet comes on the scene it is a man named King Josiah, who loved God, and is a descendant of David, who is on the throne. The plan for exile is already set into motion. Josiah dies, leaving 3 sons and a grandson.



This is most unusual for the flow chart to look this way because since the time of David it has looked only like the part in the middle.

Of those final 4 Kings of Judah:

King Jehoahaz – gets put in chains, taken to Egypt and dies

King Jehoiakim – dies at the hands of Babylonian raiders

King Jehoiachin – taken into captivity in Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar

King Zedekiah – has his eyes put out and is taken in shackles to prison in Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar and later dies there

Zedekiah is Jehoiachin's uncle whom Nebuchadnezzar puts in power and then when he burns Jerusalem takes Zedekiah away in chains and he dies in prison.

Slowly during the years of these kings the Babylonians begin to destroy and take over what is left of the land of God's people. God tells Jeremiah to instruct the people still in Jerusalem, **"See, I am setting a way before you the way of life and the way of death. Whoever stays in this city will die by the sword, famine or plague. But whoever goes out and surrenders to the Babylonians who are besieging you will live; he will escape with his life."** **Jeremiah 21:8-9** As the next wave of those being taken captive to Babylon were carried off God showed Jeremiah a picture of two baskets of figs in **Jeremiah 24**. Some figs looked good and some were rotten and could not be eaten. God said that the good ones represented the exiles He would be watching over and bringing back after 70 years. These he would give a heart that would begin to seek to know the Lord. They would be God's people. But, the bad figs represented those who still would not choose the path of life God provided and remained in the city to die. They made their choice and they would die because of it. So, now, the cities of Israel lie in ruin, the people have been taken into captivity and are being oppressed – it feels like hope is lost. It doesn't get much worse than exile and captivity. That's a pretty hopeless situation to find yourself in and that's why I've chosen this story to teach us something about what hope is all about.

They had brought this punishment upon themselves and they knew it, but it felt too late to make any real changes. Yet, hadn't God spoken of redemption through Jeremiah in chapter 24 when through the pictures of the figs in the basket God had said, **"They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart."** **Jeremiah 24:7**

The people needed to hear something from God in this moment. They needed a message of hope and encouragement after so much had happened. That leads us to a letter Jeremiah writes to them. We read this letter sent **“To the surviving elders among the exiles and to the priests, the prophets and all the other people Nebuchadnezzar had carried into exile.” Jeremiah 29:1** In this letter, sent after King Jehoiachin had been taken which left King Zedekiah back in Jerusalem leading people even further astray, God tells the people these words. Read Jeremiah 29:5-9 God gives them instruction for how to live through this exile. And then gives them something to hold onto. Read Jeremiah 29:10-14 He finishes off the letter with what will happen to those who remained and what will happen to King Zedekiah because they didn’t choose the path of life. Can I just point out that we always have a choice? God always give us a path to redemption and forgiveness and life but we have to choose to take it. Even in the punishment for having not chosen God in the first place He’s still giving a path to life.

God writes this letter through the prophet Jeremiah to encourage them.

The people reading the letter heard words that spoke of assurance. They had not been forgotten. Through that letter God says – **“I will come to you.” “I will be found by you.”** You can survive the nightmare of captivity if you know it will end – that’s hope. Hope says it won’t always be like this. God declares later through Jeremiah that when He brings them back **“They will come and shout for joy on the heights of Zion; they will rejoice in the bounty of the Lord...they will sorrow no more. Then maidens will dance and be glad, young men and old as well. I will turn their mourning into gladness; I will give them comfort and joy instead of**

sorrow.” Jeremiah 31:12-13 That’s hope! What is hope? It’s knowing with assurance it won’t always be this dark, this bad, this painful, this sorrowful. One day the captives will sing and dance and rejoice again. The knowledge that it’s coming – that’s hope.

The people reading the letter heard words that spoke of life and future.

“Marry and have sons and daughters.” Jeremiah 29:6 Marriage and children speaks of new life, new joy. Increase, prosperity – those are good words to hear when you’re living in captivity and looking for hope! And, then God states it so clearly, **“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”**

Jeremiah 29:11 In the next chapters God will speak of this again saying, **“So there is hope for your future, declares the Lord, your children will return to their own land.” Jeremiah 31:17** The promise of a future – that’s hope. What is hope? It’s knowing with confidence that God isn’t finished. He still has plans for you that are for your good. This is no mere wish – this isn’t I hope it all works out for you, hope it gets better, hope you live to see another day - this is a promise. This is God speaking words of hope and a future.

The people reading the letter heard words of redemption.

“I will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you, declares the Lord, and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.” Jeremiah 29:14 God would redeem this situation and make things right once more. Later God says, **“For the Lord will ransom Israel and redeem them from the hand of those stronger**

than they.” Jeremiah 31:11 Redemption – that’s hope! What is hope? Hope is knowing that God will redeem your life from the curse of sin if you ask Him. It’s trusting that God really will buy back your life from whatever is holding you captive. That’s hope that shouts freedom from sin and captivity to its grip. Hope is coming. Hope shows up in the most surprising of places.

To finish our story we look to the end of the book of Jeremiah and we pull out that promise I told you to remember earlier. In the final chapter, 52, in the final section of that chapter we read these words that are also included in the end of 2 Kings. **“In the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the year Awel-Marduk became king of Babylon...he released Jehoiachin king of Judah and freed him from prison. He spoke kindly to him and gave him a seat of honor higher than those of the other kings who were with him in Babylon. So Jehoiachin put aside his prison clothes and for the rest of his life ate regularly at the king’s table. Day by day the king of Babylon gave Jehoiachin a regular allowance as long as he lived, till the day of his death.” Jeremiah 52:31-34**

That’s hope that whispers it’s not finished. There was a remnant of the family of kings. Remember of those last four kings at the time of the exile – 3 are dead and Jehoiachin has been in prison for 37 years. It felt a little like hope rising up to discover that a king still lived and was released from prison.

That’s hope assuring the people that the promise to King David would and could still be fulfilled. Remember the scripture I told you not to forget? That a king from David’s line would rule forever and ever and there would be no end to His rule? If all the kings were dead this would mean God’s promise was untrue. How can a future

king rule forever if there are no more descendants? Invading armies typically put to death the kings and leaders of the nation they take captive. I always wonder why Jehoiachin was spared. Except to spark hope. And, here, buried in this small paragraph are words that sound like hope. All is not lost! The promise might still yet be fulfilled – a king still lives – that’s hope.

That’s hope pointing us once again to the future. You see the line of Judah, the line of kings, Jehoiachin out of prison and restored to family is important to us because this is the line that is written in Matthew 1. Matthew gives us the family tree for none other than Jesus himself. In verse 11 we read, **“and Josiah the father of Jehoiachin and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon. After the exile to Babylon: Jehoiachin was the father of Shealtiel.”** And then 14 generations later **“and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah.” Matthew 1:11-12, 16** The future was Jesus, and Jesus, well, that’s hope. I have a hope and a future for you, God had declared, the future was His Son, Jesus. It won’t always be like this for my son, Jesus, will come and set the captives free. The promise will be fulfilled, because Jesus will be the King of all Kings and the Lord of Lords. **“He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.” Luke 1:32-33** Hope, wrapped up in Jesus, looks like assurance that a new day has dawned, it looks like a future, it looks like redemption, it looks like promises fulfilled, it looks like Jesus.

Now, what does a roughly 2,600-year-old story about the captivity of the nation of Israel have to do with you and me and Day of Hope?

Well, maybe it isn't a Babylonian king holding you captive, but perhaps you are living in darkness this morning. Captive to your own emotions, addictions, thoughts, lifestyle – we can be held captive by a lot of things. Maybe it feels a bit bleak this morning and a little hopeless. You too need a word of hope, of encouragement that it won't always be like this. Survival becomes possible for us too when we have hope. What does hope look like for us? It looks very similar – like assurance, redemption, promises fulfilled, and a future.

Those things come together for us in a different letter, a letter written years later by an apostle named Peter. Listen to the hope that Peter shares, **“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.” 1 Peter 1:3-4** A living hope – hope that is alive and well and assures us of our salvation in Jesus! He goes on to write that in light of our salvation we, **“Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming.” 1 Peter 1:13** There's a future hope of eternal life to come and a future promise to be fulfilled when Jesus comes and is revealed to us a second time! And, Peter also speaks of redemption in his letter, **“For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish**

or defect.” 1 Peter 1:18-19 Jesus himself has redeemed us from sin and an empty, hopeless life and offered us salvation through his death on the cross. And now, **“Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.” 1 Peter 1:21** That’s hope! That’s what hope is for me and you and what it can be for others and all those who come as our invited guests to Day of Hope. What is hope? It’s the expectation we have that Jesus can and will redeem our lives from captivity and darkness and hopelessness, it is the trust we put in Him to birth a living hope inside of us that won’t perish or fade, it is the assurance that the promise will be fulfilled, and it is the looked for future hope of eternal life spent with Jesus.

You may be living in captivity this morning – but there’s hope! You may still be in need of redemption – but there’s hope! You may still be waiting for the promises God gave you to be fulfilled – but keep hoping because there’s hope for you! You may wonder if you’ll make it through the day or the week as defeated and as discouraged as you feel – but you have a future in Jesus – that’s hope!

What is hope? It’s Jesus making all the difference in your life and in your situation and reminding you that all is not lost – Jesus himself reassures us, redeems us, fulfills His promises, and gives us the hope of a bright future.

Let’s stand and thank the Lord for the hope we have in Jesus!

Salvation

