

## Conquering Your Crisis series

9/20/2020

Welcome to our new sermon series entitled, "Conquering Your Crisis".

*A crisis is defined as: a time of intense difficulty, trouble, or danger or a time when a difficult or important decision must be made.*

In mental health terms, a **crisis** refers not necessarily to a traumatic situation or event, but rather, to a **person's reaction to an event**. One person might be deeply affected by an event while another individual suffers little or no ill effects. This morning I want to look at how we often **do** and how we **should** react to **challenging circumstances** in our lives. Because much of our character is molded and shaped by these moments of stress in our lives – both for good and for bad

For most of 2020 we've been living in the midst of several key moments in time that can cause reactions in us that will both reveal and shape our character.

- **health challenges** from Covid-19,
- **financial challenges** with many people unemployed,
- **social challenges** with not being able to see many of our friends,
- **psychological challenges** from any or all of these combined.

In every one of these you find yourself at a **change point**, a point at which you need to make some key decisions. It's that change point that I want to talk to you about over the next couple of weeks. And I think we're all wise enough to realize that these challenging circumstances likely won't cease any time soon. They will keep coming throughout your life, so we should give careful thought to how we respond to them. Hopefully we're prepared to respond in a God honoring way.

To accomplish this, we're going to be looking closer at two well-known passages of Scripture. Today, **Jeremiah 29:11** and then next week we will begin to take a closer look at **2 Chronicles 7:14**.

**So, please turn to Jeremiah 29:11** because it's important to extend our study beyond this one verse.

On Friday I sent out a link to a video that **Esther Banaian** produced providing the context for this verse. I hope many of you took the time to watch it. As Esther points out, we often use this text to try to cheer people up during difficult times. And yet in it's original context, nearly 2,600 years ago, it wasn't likely very encouraging to it's original recipients.

One obvious question would be – **does this even apply to us today** – since God spoke it 2,600 years ago to the Israelite nation? I will answer that later in the sermon.

So, let's first look at the **context** of this promise by God.

The Israelite nation had a long history of turning away from God to serve and worship other gods.

Remember, when God first rescued them, they were slaves in Egypt, where many gods were worshipped. So, that's what they were used to. And their historical pattern was that they would turn away from God to these gods, then God would bring his judgment upon them, they'd realize what they'd done and cry out to God and He would rescue them just to begin the cycle all over again.

In our setting today, they are living under **God's judgment** for continually turning away and many of them have been deported to Babylon. So, not only did they experience a hostile takeover but then they were uprooted from their homes and forced to live in the foreign land of Babylon. Jeremiah had previously warned them that this was going to happen, but they refused to change. Then, once they were in Babylon and began crying out to God for His rescue a false prophet, by the name of **Hananiah** arose and told them that the Lord would bring them back to their homeland in a mere **2 years**. However, God never told him any such thing and within a short period of time he was dead.

So, then along comes Jeremiah and he tells them they are going to be there for a while, actually **70 years** instead of 2. Now, this would not be good news. If you're an adult, you're probably never going back to your home. And God tells them to not just sit around and mourn but to establish homes, plant garden,

grow their families where they are and to be a blessing to the Babylonians. Follow along as I read these exact words from the Lord to these refugees in Babylon:

**Jeremiah 29:4-9 (NIV)** *This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: 5 “Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. 6 Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. 7 Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.” 8 Yes, this is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: “Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have. 9 They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them,” declares the LORD. When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. (“this place” is back to their home country).*

That’s the first point to remember in conquering our crisis.

1. **God hasn’t forgotten you in the midst of your crisis.** It didn’t catch Him by surprise. He has plans for you, in your crisis event.
2. **God’s calling you to make a difference in the middle of your crisis.** Be the presence of God right where you are right now and pray for God’s blessing upon it. Why? Because if you’re praying for someone to prosper, it’s difficult to remain mad at that person. One of the best tools to use in arriving at forgiveness and healing is to pray for God to bless that individual. Sometimes we rationalize – if and when God changes my circumstances, then and only then will I be in a position to be used by Him. God doesn’t think that way. He wants to use you right where you find yourself at this very moment in time. And if you don’t know how to do that, begin asking God for direction and ideas. He’s way more creative than you or I are. And He’s got resources that He can pull in to equip you to do what He’s calling you to do in your current situation. But, God doesn’t need you to be **better prepared** – He just needs you to be **available**. We often pray for God to get me out of my current crisis. But what if He wants to use you to make a difference in the midst of your crisis. Or what if He wants to use your current crisis to change YOU?

Next, God shares with them His future plans for them and what their part is in it’s fulfillment.

**Jeremiah 29:11-14 (NIV)** *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. 12 And you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. 13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. 14 I will be found by you,” declares the LORD, “and 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.”*

Do you see the partnership in God blessing you? We have a part and God has a part.

- **What’s our part?** *And you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you*
- **God’s part:** *For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future*

Many times Scripture it talks about God’s desire and intention to bless His people. But most often, it also talks about our part in bringing God’s blessing to fulfillment.

(NOTE: The highlighted sections are our part, and no highlighted are God’s part)

**Psalms 37:4** *Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.*

**Psalms 37:23** *The LORD makes firm the steps of the one who delights in him;*

**Proverbs 3:5-6** *Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and He will make your paths straight.*

**Malachi 3:10** *Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.*

**Matthew 6:31-33** *So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

**John 15:7** *If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.*

**Hebrews 11:6** *And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him **must believe that he exists** and that *he rewards those who earnestly seek him.**

**John Piper** suggests that God is a God who loves blessing His children abundantly. And he describes God this way:

*"God is infinitely energetic with absolutely unbounded and unending enthusiasm for the fulfillment of His delights.*

*This is hard for us to comprehend, because we have to sleep every day just to cope, not to mention thrive. Our emotions go up and down. We get bored and discouraged one day and feel hopeful and excited another.*

*We are like little geysers that gurgle and sputter and pop erratically. But God is like a great Niagara Falls — you look at 186,000 tons of water crashing over the precipice every minute and think: Surely this can't keep going at this force year after year after year. Yet it does.*

*That's the way God is about doing us good. He never grows weary of it. It never gets boring to him. The Niagara of his grace has no end.*

So, **does Jeremiah 29:11 apply to us in the year 2020** - since God uttered it about 2600 years prior to this? I believe it definitely does, because, as we've seen, His intention to bless His people is repeated many times throughout Scripture. But the context of that original promise ought to teach us that **this is not a guarantee that we won't encounter problems in our lives.**

No doubt some of those Israelites hearing this promise must have scoffed at God's promise to not cause them harm. After all, they'd been violently overtaken by the Babylonian army, deported back to Babylon and now God's telling them they are going to be there for 70 years. How is that not harming us?

Similarly, some of you may think of things you've been through and you also questioned God's goodness to you in the midst of those times. Perhaps some of you are going through that even now. What you need to know is that God has not forgotten you in the midst of these times of difficulty. It didn't catch Him by surprise. And it may not make sense to you right now, and I can't promise that it will make sense to you in the future. But what I do know is that God is a loving and generous God who desires to bless you. But **sometimes, He needs us to go through difficulties for our refinement.**

We see this in Romans 8:28-29

**Romans 8:28-29 (NIV)** *"We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. In some of your situations you might think – this doesn't seem like God is working for my good in this. (But don't forget vs. 29)*

*For those God foreknew he also predestined to be **conformed to the image of his Son**, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters*

Often we need to go through difficult times to get us to go **deeper in our transformation into Christlikeness** or our **dependency upon God**. We can go through life believing in God, while also developing an attitude of **self-sufficiency**, and God kind of gets put into our back pocket, reserved for emergencies. And sometimes, God needs to allow difficulties to come into our lives to remind us that we're not designed to live lives independent from God. We were created to be dependent upon Him for life itself. That's why Jesus stressed, *"Apart from me, you can do nothing."*

I want to refer you to an excellent sermon on YouTube that someone alerted me to this week. It's by **J.D. Farag** and it's entitled, "**Why is God allowing all this?**" He does a very fine job explaining various reasons why God brings or allows difficult situations into our lives.

In closing remember that God wants to bless you. But His blessing may not look like what you think it should. Because God's biggest concern is not your health or wealth but your relationship with Him. And out of that relationship He does want to bless you **so that** you can be a blessing to others each and every day. **Your impact on the world around you is designed to be the overflow of this deep relationship with God.**

But for that to happen you need to make it a daily practice and throughout the day to **continually call out to God**. Maybe that looks like a **short one sentence prayer**. Or, maybe it looks more like having a **conversation with your best friend** where you share your deepest thoughts and feelings. Or maybe it's telling God how much He means to you or thanking Him for what He's done for you. Or maybe you share with Him your frustrations with how life is right now. And then **take time to listen** to what He has to say. Communication with God is meant to be a **dialogue not a** monologue. It wouldn't be much of a relationship with someone if your friend came to you, talked a bunch and then left, without listening to you. And God wants a relationship with you in which both of you talk. And sometimes it might seem awkward at first but if you give it time, you'll begin to hear from Him, sometimes audibly but other times through impressions the Holy Spirit lays on your mind or heart. Pay attention to those impressions.

And here is the best part. God, the creator and sustainer of the universe we live in, says that if we seek him with all of our heart, **we will find Him** and **He will listen to us**.

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**Jeremiah 29:11** 9/20/2020

What is a “*crisis*”?

What are some major crisis you’ve experienced?

How do you generally respond to crisis in your life?

What’s the context of Jeremiah 29:11?

What’s God’s instructions to the Israelites in this crisis moment?

Was that good news?

**Key things to remember in a crisis:**

1. God hasn’t \_\_\_\_\_ you.
2. God’s calling you to make a \_\_\_\_\_ in the midst of your crisis.
3. God wants to bless you, but you have a \_\_\_\_\_ in your blessing. (see the following Scriptures) and record your part and God’s part.

Psalm 37:4, 23

Proverbs 3:5-6

Malachi 3:10

Matthew 6:31-33

John 15:7

Hebrews 11:6

Jeremiah 29:11-14

Does Jeremiah 29:11 apply to us today?

4. Sometimes we need to go through difficulties for our \_\_\_\_\_
5. Crisis events can teach us greater \_\_\_\_\_ upon God.
6. Your impact on the world is meant to be an \_\_\_\_\_ of your relationship with God.

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