

"Hope"

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. This is that funny season in our church life where summer is ending and the fall is beginning.

! And some of you are brand new to New Haven, to Trinity, and want to welcome you and say we're glad you're here. Some of us have been here all summer, listening to sermons in a hot church, on the book of 2 Chronicles. And today we're going to finish our series in the book of 2 Chronicles. So, if you want to, you can look in the Pew Bible, page 361. We'll be looking at chapter 36. So, just wanted to orient us as we begin by asking this question.

How do we move ahead with hope in a broken and insecure world? Some of you may be feeling that anxiety because of our global situation. In the last five years, we've had a pandemic that continues, its after effects continue to shape our lives.

We live in a polarized world and the whiplash of politics is fierce. We live in a time of economic uncertainty and volatility and international crises and the threat of war.

[1 : 23] There's a lot of brokenness and a lot of insecurity in the world, isn't there? And some of you bear this in your own hearts. But maybe many of us also carry personal insecurities and experience with a broken world.

Maybe you've just moved here and you're launching out into a new season of life and everything is new, but everything is uncertain. Maybe you've lived here for a long time, but you know the hardness of living in a broken world.

Maybe you're walking through chronic pain. You're living the reality of aging and the effects that it has. Maybe you're in a new stage of life. You're a newlywed or new parents.

Whatever it is, there's a lot of insecurity in our lives, isn't there? And this is the question I believe that the book of 2 Chronicles was trying to address.

We're going to be looking at chapter 36 and focusing in on it, but I'm trying to draw out of that themes that I think are broader, that I think actually can capture everything that we've seen or the most important things that we've seen from the book of 2 Chronicles this whole time.

[2 : 41] And because some of us are new, we want to remind ourselves, how did the book of 2 Chronicles fit in the whole picture? The book of 2 Chronicles was written after, probably somewhere in the 500-400 B.C. range.

It was written to the people of God, the nation of Israel, after the exile. What is the exile? Do you remember? Way back, 1000 B.C., God established a kingdom, and He put David on the throne, and this was the height.

David and Solomon was the height of the kingdom of God on earth in Israel in a physical way. But from there, there was this slow decline.

And the book of Kings and the book of Chronicles both picture this decline of the people of God and the leaders of God becoming increasingly unfaithful.

And no, it wasn't a straight line. It was like everything. It was up and down. There were movements of good and then movements of evil. But it led to, at the end, the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 by the kingdom of Babylon and King Nebuchadnezzar.

[3 : 52] The city was broken. The temple was destroyed. The walls were taken down. The kings were taken into exile. And for 70 years, they lived away.

And if you had gone to Jerusalem, if you had gone to Israel, you would not know that it was a nation, let alone a nation with great glory. And then God worked to bring them back.

And as they brought back, they were diminished. They had no king. They had a smaller temple. They were a vassal state to other superpowers.

And the writer of 2 Chronicles is writing to those people in that uncertain and broken time when they're asking the question, how do we move ahead with hope?

It feels like we're just living in the wreckage of this exile. This is the question that I think 2 Chronicles is trying to answer.

[4 : 56] And I think they're looking for a game plan. The people were looking for, God, what do we do now? And it's really easy. What the chronicler does is says, let's look back.

Let's look back on our history to see what we can learn about how we can move ahead. But it's very easy for us, and let's be honest, if we are preaching on the book of 1 and 2 Kings, this might be more of the message.

Because it's easy for us to look at the story of the kings and think, who are the good guys and who are the bad guys? Who are the black hats and who are the white hats in the western? You know, who do we want to get shot and who do we want to survive this battle?

And it's so easy for us to look at the kings in that way. But interestingly, if you've been here, you know this, 2 Chronicles doesn't really let us do that. Because even the worst kings, like Manasseh, they talk about his repentance at the end of his life.

And even the best kings, like Josiah, do really stupid things and proudly go out and get themselves killed. And so, there are no good and bad.

[6 : 00] There's always a mix of good and bad in this. So, if we don't get that kind of thing, where there are no heroes for us to say, if only we had a new Josiah or Hezekiah or whoever it was, then what is it that he's trying to say?

What is it that he's trying to say? Where do we go to find hope to move ahead? And it's not surprising, because this is what the Bible does to us over and over again.

But what the Chronicler points us to is not the leaders of the people, but the God of the people. To look at who God is in 2 Chronicles.

And in this, the writer of the Chronicles, to that audience and to us, is seeking to give us hope as we seek the God of Israel.

So, with that introduction, we're going to go ahead and read chapter 36 of 2 Chronicles. Again, that's page 361 in your pew Bible.

[7 : 07] So, let's read God's Word together. The people of the land took Jehoaz, the son of Josiah, and made him king in his father's place in Jerusalem.

Jehoaz was 23 years old when he began to reign, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. Then the king of Egypt deposed him in Jerusalem, and laid on the land a tribute of a hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold.

And the king of Egypt made Eliakim, his brother, king over Judah and Jerusalem, and changed his name to Jehoiakim. But Necho took Jehoaz, his brother, and carried him to Egypt.

Jehoiakim was 25 years old when he began to reign, and he reigned 11 years in Jerusalem. He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord his God. Against him came up Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and bound him in chains to take him to Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar also carried part of the vessels of the house of the Lord to Babylon, and put them in his place in his palace in Babylon. Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim and the abominations that he did, and what was found against him, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah, and Jehoiachin, his son, reigned in his place.

[8 : 24] Jehoiachin was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned three months and ten days in Jerusalem. He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. In the spring of the year, King Nebuchadnezzar sent and brought him to Babylon with the precious vessels of the house of the Lord, and made his brother Zedekiah king over Judah and Jerusalem.

Zedekiah was 21 years old when he began to reign, and he reigned 11 years in Jerusalem. He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord his God. He did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet, who spoke from the mouth of the Lord.

He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God. He stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the Lord, the God of Israel.

All the officers of the priests and the people, likewise, were exceedingly unfaithful, following all the abominations of the nations, and they polluted the house of the Lord that he had made holy in Jerusalem.

Then the Lord, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place.

[9 : 43] But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words, and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord rose against his people, until there was no remedy.

Therefore he brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with a sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or aged.

He gave them all into his hand. And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king and of his princes, all these he brought to Babylon.

And they burned the house of God, and broke down the wall of Jerusalem, and burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all its precious vessels. He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths.

All the days that it lay desolate, it kept Sabbath to fulfill 70 years. Now, in the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, now in the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing.

[11 : 28] Thus says Cyrus, king of Persia, The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

Whoever is among you of all his people, may the Lord his God be with him. Let him go up. And that is the word of God.

Let's pray and ask for his help. Lord, thank you for this word. Lord, thank you that you have given us your spirit so that we might understand it rightly. I pray for your help, that the words that I speak would be pleasing to you.

And I pray for all of us that as we sit under your word, that we would receive it. Lord, move our hearts to love what you love. Move our wills to submit to your will.

Move our hands to be obedient to your call and to do what you've called us to. Thank you, Lord. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Finding hope in the God of Israel in a broken and insecure world is what our passage is about this morning.

[12 : 45] Now, you may have noticed it, my pacing, even as I read it. The first 14 verses are this litany, right? Four kings over 23 years. And all it does is say, and it got worse, and it got worse, and it got worse.

Egypt and then Babylon are taking these kings out of off their thrones and putting them into Israel. You see the vessels in the temple, the riches of Israel slowly getting siphoned away and taken away.

And you get to verses 13 and 14, and it's just almost unbelievable. He stiffened his neck and he hardened his heart against turning to the Lord, the God of Israel.

And all the officials and all the priests everywhere did what was abominable. And this is the description of Israel at the end.

And it's fascinating because, again, if you've been here in Chronicles, we get full histories of kings. You know, this is the king, and this was his mother, and this is how old he was, and he reigned for this long.

[13 : 45] And then at the end, we get a story of, and this is how he died, and this is how the people responded. Do you notice there's no end to these kings? They just disappear into exile.

That's intentional. It's good historical storytelling. He's saying, these men were gone. They disappeared, and that's what happened to the kingdom.

Right? It's hurtling towards conclusion of this final act of God in ending the kingdom through the invasion of Babylon and the exile.

But then did you notice in verse 15, the subject changed. Verses 1 through 14 is about the kings. And, again, we just talked about how we want to read this like, oh, who's the king?

Who's the hero? I get to follow. In verse 15, we see the answer. And this is the first point that I want to make to you today is that in verse 15, as the focal point shifts from the kings to God, we see a

God who persistently and compassionately pursues his people.

[14:55] Look with me at verse 15. The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place.

I think I got this right. If you go back to the post-David and Solomon era, so the period of the kings, there are nine different prophets explicitly mentioned that God sent to speak to the people of Israel to say, seek the Lord, follow him, forsake idols, don't trust in your alliances, trust in God.

Not to mention Jeremiah, who we finally see emerge here. Here's a... if you're putting your whole Bible together, Jeremiah served as a prophet during the time of Josiah all the way through into the exile.

So, Jeremiah was a prophet in Israel during that whole time. That's a whole Sunday school class on how you put all that together. But it's... so, God came and he was persistent in pursuing his people. Why? Because he had compassion on them. And this word actually has a sense of having pity or sparing people. I was thinking about it. It's... it's kind of like a parent who keeps trying to give his children instruction saying, you really don't want to go that way.

[16:23] There's a better way to do this. Do... go... walk in these ways. Don't walk in these ways. Because if you walk in these ways, there are going to be consequences. He's trying to... by sending his prophets, he kept trying to spare them from the judgment.

Because he loves them. And the chronicler wanted to make sure that the post-exilic audience remembered this character of God.

God has pursued his people. He is persistent. He is patient and he is compassionate. He desires to know you and for you to be his people.

This is the hope. I won't abandon you, my people. I am for you. We have a tendency when someone persistently disobeys, when we... people harden their hearts and stiffen their necks and reject us and rebel against us.

We have a human instinct to just write people off and say, fine, you're going to be that way. I am done with you. And it would be really easy for the people in the post-exilic period to think that's what God has done with us.

[17:40] He has written us off. But God is not like that. I am reminded of the words that Peter wrote in 2 Peter 3.

It's a beautiful verse. It's in a context where Peter is writing in Rome and there are people who are making fun of Christians because judgment hasn't come yet. Christians talk about God is going to judge the world one day.

And here in, you know, probably 70 AD or so, maybe a little bit earlier, people are saying, well, where is it? Where is that judgment? And Peter says, listen, the judgment is coming.

I promise you it's coming and it's going to be terrible. But, and this is his end of that statement about the judgment. He says, but the Lord is not slow to fulfill his promises as some count slowness, but is patient towards you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

Friends, this is the God who is at work today calling us individually, calling us as humanity to return to him before it's too late.

[18:54] This is the call of a compassionate and a persistent and a patient God. So, this is the first thing we see in this section.

The second thing is a little bit surprising given what we just said. Because in verses 16 to 20, we see the chronicler saying, find hope in God who rejects evil and the unrighteousness of his people. All right. So, when you look at verses 16 through 20, what do you see, right? God pursued his people through prophets and how did they respond?

Verse 16 is shocking. They kept mocking the messengers, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets. Have you ever been mocked, scoffed at, despised?

It's a terrible evil to do that to someone else and even more so to the God of the universe. And at some point, God said, no more.

[20:10] The end of verse 16 is a terrifying phrase. There was no remedy. No more prophets are going to come and say, turn before the judgment comes.

The judgment came. The judgment came in the person of Nebuchadnezzar. The judgment came in the exile. And it was terrible. And we struggle with this in our world today.

We struggle with judgment and wrath. And you all have heard me say this before. I'm not going to spend all day on it. But I wanted to say briefly, we struggle with wrath and anger and judgment

being good because we can't imagine it being righteous.

We always imagine that wrath and anger is either selfish or impure. It's self-serving. And therefore, it's never good, right?

The anger is never good. And yet, we still have this impulse in our heart. When we hear an account of genocide or of rape or of sex trafficking, right?

[21 : 18] When we hear of a massive theft that leaves people bereft of everything, we think they deserve to be punished. They deserve judgment.

And so, we have this sense. And yet, we struggle with it because we can't imagine it being good. But the Bible tells us that the God of the universe is perfect and righteous in everything that He does.

And we can see that for 400 years, He was patient. And at some point, it was right for judgment to come.

Because evil can't persist forever. If it does, then God isn't good. And we have lost all hope in the world. If there is no judgment, if evil does not face a final reckoning, what a terrible world it is to live in.

And so, in fact, we want God to judge evil, even though it is scary for us. And it really was scary. When you look at verses 17 through 20, the description of this is that the judgment was comprehensive and terrifying.

[22 : 36] Did you notice all the times that the writer said all? All the people were given into His hands. All the vessels from the temple were taken.

The city, the temple, the walls, they were all broken down. All of these people who survived the sword, He took into exile in Babylon.

Now, there's a little bit of literary license. We know from other parts of the Bible that a few poor people were left to try to scrounge in the land of Palestine during the exile.

But there was no kingdom. There was no government. There was no society. There was no temple. All of that had been destroyed in God's judgment.

There was nothing left at the end of it. God finally gave His people what they wanted, which is life without Him. And found out that it was terrible and terrifying.

[23 : 36] Their presumption that they could do whatever they wanted, God would be pleased, was exposed and punished. And even as they returned, there's a sense of being chastised.

The post-exilic people were wondering, how do we live when God has judged us like this? Can we move forward with hope? Or has He actually written us off?

But God hasn't written His people off. He promised not only to bring judgment to end evil, but He promised to overcome evil.

Overcome evil with His own sacrifice. And so the prophet Isaiah, in the famous words in Isaiah 53, predicted a servant who would come.

And this man would come despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

[24 : 46] And as one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon Him was a chastisement that brought us peace.

And with His wounds, we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to His own way. And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

You see, my friends, the amazing thing about the God of the Bible is that as committed as He is to judging evil, He would do it in an unbelievable way so that we might find hope rather than merely fear and condemnation.

What an amazing thing it is that Jesus would take the wrath of God for His people so that we might have peace with God.

[26 : 05] And this, of course, turns us to the last thing we see in this passage. And it's a word of hope. In verses 21 through 24, we see a call to find hope in God who sovereignly orders all things for His redemptive plan.

Verse 21, did it jump out at you as feeling really weird? Like, we're suddenly talking about the Sabbath here? What in the world is that about? Okay, so really quickly, the command from Leviticus

25 was that the land was meant to rest one out of every seven years.

And there was a warning in that passage about if you don't do this, there will be consequences. There will be judgment. And then we see a whole history of the kingdom of Israel where there's no record of ever giving the land rest.

And so, okay, you got to do some interesting calculations. It's not deceptive, but you got to count from the right place to the right place. But from the beginning of David's reign to the end of the exile is about 490 years.

And do you know what one-seventh of 490 is? Seventy. The 70 years that the people of Israel were in exile, the land lay fallow.

[27 : 22] It was a Sabbath rest. And I believe that the chronicler frames it like this to give us hope. Because the Sabbath rest is a reminder of God's faithfulness to His people to provide and to protect.

And at the end of the day, we see the Sabbath leading us to finding the Sabbath rest of salvation in Christ. And so, the first word of hope is, though you may not keep the Sabbath, I'm going to make the Sabbath happen so that you will remember my provision.

And then in verses 22 and 23, we see the most remarkable thing in the world. Right? The chronicler is actually stealing, if you look ahead, the book of Ezra, the next page, it's the same two verses, almost verbatim.

Right? He just took those words and said, okay, I'm just going to remind you, this is where this story is going. He's told the story of all of the kingdom of Israel.

And what we've seen at the end of 2 Chronicles is this slow, inevitable, inexorable march of decline towards judgment and exile.

[28 : 48] The kings failed and the people failed and God acted. And yet at the very end, God chooses to raise up, what, a new king? No, a pagan king.

Cyrus, the king of the Persians. Some of the global background. The Babylonians ruled at the beginning of the exile. By the end of the exile, the Persians had beaten the Babylonians. So the Persians were now in charge of Israel.

So Cyrus says, hey, we're going to do something new. But God moved through a pagan king to speak his words to his people to begin the process of restoration.

Now, the people who heard this knew this already because they were the fruit of that, right? The books of Ezra and Nehemiah tell us the history of the return to Israel, returning the people, rebuilding the temple, rebuilding the walls.

Jerusalem was rebuilt. And so the people receiving this book already knew what happened here. You know, they don't have to, the writer doesn't have to say anything more about it because they already knew. But the writer put this in and ended here to say, this is the God that you are serving now.

[30 : 02] And this is the God as you look forward that you can have, find hope in because this God has not abandoned his people.

He will restore them. He will forgive them. He will bring to fullness the promise, the restoration. He will provide a kingdom and a temple and a king so that we can worship God rightly.

And this is what the end of the book of Chronicles reminds us of. A God who is compassionate and persistent in pursuing his people.

A God who will not let evil stand forever but will bring judgment to purify the world and bring righteousness to bear. And finally, a God who in his sovereignty will work in ways that we can't even imagine to bring about the fulfillment of his promises and a people who will worship him in this world.

And friends, you know where I'm going on this but we've got to finish it with this. In the Hebrew Bible, Chronicles was the last book of the Old Testament. And it sets us up for 400 years later when God took on human flesh in the person of Jesus and came to earth.

[31 : 32] And when he arrived, he said, the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the good news. And this king came and he established his kingdom.

not with a great army, not with a geopolitical entity, but through the preaching of the kingdom of God and through his own life full of grace and truth heading towards the greatest work of redemption on the cross where he bore the wrath of God against the sin of humanity.

as he died an innocent man in our place. And in bearing that sin and that judgment, he earned for us our redemption and he rose from the dead to establish forever that sin and death are not going to win, that evil will not triumph, but that in Christ there is a victory and a fullness that is still yet to come.

And you know that we're still waiting for it, right? We haven't seen the fullness of it. We've seen the fullness of Jesus and his work of redemption and we're longing to see the outworking of all of that in the world.

And we live in a broken and insecure world and we wonder at times, where do I find hope? And just like the chronicler, we look back in history to the person and the work of Jesus and say, this is where our hope is because he has done all that is done for the promises of God to be fulfilled.

[33 : 29] Friends, if you are here this morning and your experience of Christianity has been more of a who's the model that I need to follow so I can do enough right things so that God will be pleased with me.

Or if you're here and you're just exploring what in the world is this Jesus thing all about, I invite you to stick around and explore who the person of Jesus is.

See what he has done and hear his call. come, follow me. If you're feeling wracked with insecurity, Jesus says, come, follow me and I will show you the path of life.

And if you already know him, be reminded in the midst of the ups and downs of your day today and of this week and this month and this year and this decade and this century in the uncertainty and the insecurity and the brokenness of this world, where do we set our hope?

We set our hope on Jesus because he is a compassionate God and in Jesus we have forgiveness of our sins and eternal life with him.

[34 : 49] Let's pray. Amen. Lord, thank you for this word of hope. Lord, even as it tells a terrible story of decline and judgment, Lord, yet we see you in the midst of it reminding us of what kind of a God you are.

Lord, turn our hearts to you today that we might seek you with all of our heart and in doing so find hope. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen.