

Life is full of troubles, Christians, big and small, and it's only natural for us to hope in something better, to look for something better than what we currently have. But the question that I ask you today is this, Christians. What do you put your hope in? Do you put your hope in God? Or do you put your hope in something else? Because that is the issue that Jeremiah is dealing with in our Old Testament reading for today.

Jeremiah in this reading is speaking to King Zedekiah. And Zedekiah was the last of the kings of Judah, the last of the kings that ruled in the land of Israel. But Zedekiah wasn't much of a king. Because about 10 years before this point when Jeremiah is speaking, King Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, had come through that region, and he had conquered everything in his path. And he had defeated Zedekiah's brother in battle. And after he had defeated him, he took him away from being king, and he made Zedekiah king in his place. So Zedekiah was a puppet king. He was only king because of someone else. He was only king because of Nebuchadnezzar. And he didn't like that. He didn't like it at all. He wanted to be a king, a real king, one who ruled in his own land, one who ruled upon his own throne, who wasn't playing second fiddle to somebody else. He was going to do things his way, the way that his father Josiah had done several years before. And so Zedekiah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. He was going to throw off the yoke of Babylon. You can only imagine how well Nebuchadnezzar took that news. He was on his way now with his armies to put down this revolt, to bring order back to his empire, and to set things right again. But Zedekiah was now afraid. This was not what he was anticipating, apparently. Zedekiah was wondering what was going to happen when Nebuchadnezzar finally came. And so now he's looking for something to get him out. He's looking for a hope for his future so that he will be able to succeed when Nebuchadnezzar finally comes.

Now Zedekiah certainly could have put his hope in God. After all, that's what his father Josiah had done many years before. Josiah trusted in the Lord. Josiah was a good king, one of the best kings that Israel ever had. And because Josiah trusted in the Lord, the Lord took care of him all throughout his life. But Zedekiah was not like his father. Zedekiah was an evil man. Zedekiah like being king. He liked all the perks that came with being a king. He liked the wealth. He liked all of the fancy houses. He liked the respect. He liked the power that came with being king. He was not going to be king on someone else's terms. He was going to be a king in his own right. And so Zedekiah put his trust not in God like his father had done, but instead in himself, in his own strength, in the power of his army. It was by that army, Zedekiah thought, that he would defeat the Babylonian armies. And he would find a future for the people of Israel.

Now, Zedekiah, a little bit before our reading for today, sent a message to Jeremiah during this time of preparation. And he said, "Jeremiah, talk to the Lord our God. Put in a good word for us, because God has done so many good things for us in the past, just maybe, he'll do it again." Now Zedekiah didn't do this because he was a believer. He did it because he was hedging his bets. He figured, "Hey, we need to make a little bit more preparation, so why not get God on our side so that we can tip things in our favor? Then things will really go well, and we'll be able to shake off the yoke of Babylon." But it didn't work. The Lord gave him an answer. He said, "You really want to trust in me? Do you really want to put your hope in me, Zedekiah? Then go out to Nebuchadnezzar. Surrender to him. Don't fight him at all. Give yourself over to him, and then you will save your life." But Zedekiah didn't want that. He wants to be a king on his own terms. And so he refused to listen to the Lord his God.

Christians, what do you put your hope in? What do you trust in? Do you trust in the Lord your God? Or do you trust in the things of this world the way that Zedekiah had done? Well, how do we know the difference? How can we tell the two apart? How do I know if I'm putting my trust in the Lord, or if I'm putting my trust in something else? Consider what Zedekiah did. When the Lord came to him and gave him an opportunity to trust him by going out to Nebuchadnezzar, by surrendering to the king of Babylon, if he had submitted at that point and went with him no matter what happened to him, then he would trust in the Lord his God. But Zedekiah wanted things his way. He didn't want to rely on somebody else, and so he put his trust in the things of this world. And that really makes the difference here, Christians. When we trust the Lord, when we put our hope in the Lord and in the Lord alone, then no matter what happens, even if it's contrary to our expectations, no matter what happens, we still follow him.

Let me put it to you in a few examples so you understand what I mean. When we're dealing with an issue of health, for example, we're wondering when we are going to be well again. Do we put our hope only in doctors and in medicines and in vaccines, thinking that that is the way out of our current predicament? Or do we put our hope in the Lord our God, knowing that he might use those things for our good. He might use doctors and medicines and vaccines for our benefit. That's his choice. But he also might not. We might have to wait for a long time before the Lord chooses to act. But will we trust in him? Or when we're dealing with a political situation, and we see how this nation, for example, is seemingly collapsing around us. Do we look for politicians to help us? If we just get the right man in office, then everything would be better? Or if we just passed the right laws, then everything would be renewed, and we'd all be doing well again? Or do we trust in the Lord, knowing that he can bring us renewal, that he can bring us peace in this time? Or that even if he doesn't, that he will still be our fortress when all the world is against us? Or what about our general anxieties, our worries about what tomorrow might hold and our trying to get more and more things so that we know that we have a future? Are we going to put our trust in our own two hands, as if we can somehow make things better for ourselves? Or are we going to trust in the Lord who has promised to give us all good things? And he will not fail on those promises.

Christians, when we trust in the Lord and put our hopes in him, then we will follow him no matter where he leads. Even if it means we have to suffer, even if it means things are not going to go the way we thought they should go, we know that he's still going to take care of us, because he is Lord. And he has promised us something far better than anything this world can provide.

That's ultimately the point here of Jeremiah chapter 23. Jeremiah is speaking to king Zedekiah. Zedekiah who tried to be the hope of Israel, who tried to be the one who would give them all good things. And the Lord is speaking to him and saying to him, "Zedekiah, no. You are not the hope of Israel. You are not the one who is going to take care of my people. I am. I the Lord am the hope of Israel. I the Lord will give them everything which they need. For behold, declares the Lord, the days are coming when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely. I myself, the Lord, will raise up a king for Israel, the king that you, Zedekiah, never were and never could be. And this king, he will save my people. This king will be the hope of Israel. This king will be the one who will give them the things that you thought that you could. Zedekiah, you promised them peace, that through your military strength you

would give them peace in this land and throw off the yoke of Babylon. But in the days of the Branch whom I will raise up, I the Lord will bring up the Prince of Peace, the one who will bring a peace which shall never come to an end. Because I the Lord am the hope of Israel. You, Zedekiah, promised them salvation, a salvation from Nebuchadnezzar, salvation in this time. You're not going to be able to do it, because I will take them away. But I will raise up in the days of the Branch a Savior who shall deliver my people Israel. He shall be their hope and deliver them from every trouble. And you, Zedekiah, promised them that you would leave them in their own land, that they would continue in the inheritance of their fathers as if they would never ever be taken away. That's not going to happen. They have to leave. Nebuchadnezzar is going to win. And they will be taken into far countries away from this land. But I the Lord will bring them back, and I will give in the days of the Branch an inheritance that shall never pass away. Because I the Lord am the hope of Israel, and not you, Zedekiah."

Christians, this Branch, whom the Lord promised in Jeremiah chapter 23, is our Lord Jesus Christ. The King, the true son of David, who has now come to his people and has reigned in the place of his father David, bringing a peace that the world cannot understand, bringing a salvation that will go on forever, being the inheritance of his people. He is the one who has done all of these things, because God does not fail in his promises.

And Jesus is also your hope too, Christians. When we are struggling with health, Jesus has promised that he will give us healing, either in this life or absolutely in the life to come when he will wipe away every tear from our eyes, and death and sickness and disease shall be no more. Jesus Christ is our peace, the one who comes to bring us a peace which the world cannot understand, a peace which the world cannot bring throughout all of its political promises. Because Jesus is the one who can transform society through the Gospel, and he is also the one who gives us every good thing. Jesus Christ is our salvation, Christians, the one who has promised us everything in him. And when we cling to him, we don't have to be anxious or worried about tomorrow, because he will deliver on all of his promises. Jesus is the one in whom God has said Yes and Amen to everything. Jesus is the fulfillment of every one of God's words.

So don't be afraid, Christians. Don't worry about what tomorrow might bring. Jesus reigns as King. He will reign as king forever. So don't trust in the world. Don't put your hope in the things of this world, because it will fail you. But Jesus who goes on forever will never fail you.

To him be the glory, now and forever. Amen.