

Jeremiah 41:1-18 True Hope by Exile Falls Church AM 1/8/2023

As we return to our study of Jeremiah, let me remind you what has been happening just prior to chapter 41.

The context was fall of Jerusalem. The city walls were levelled. The great temple built by Solomon was burned, and its treasures removed. The columns of the temple toppled down. The splendor of the place was reduced to dust + rubble.

For 40 years, Jeremiah had been preaching to prevent this tragedy.

But the people would not listen to God. The people would not turn to God and obey God. It was the death of a nation. Is there any hope? Yes! With God, there is always hope. The hope is in restoration after exile, and resurrection for the dead nation, through its coming King!

Now our opening verse of chapter 41, we learn that Ishmael is of royal blood. We also are told that it is seven months into the Governorship of Gedaliah. So, we have a dinner and two opposite parties represented.

On the one side is Gedaliah, who represents submitting to God's plan of exile and the Babylonian takeover, followed by a promised restoration in 70 years.

On the other side is Ishmael, who represents immediately going back to God's previous plan of having a king in the line of David be the one to rise up and defend Jerusalem, and God's remaining people in Jerusalem. Even, to take back Jerusalem by force, if necessary.

In verse 1, we have those two opposite groups gathered. One meal.

Ancient customs of meal hospitality were very robust and insistent. The host for the meal was obligated to protect the guests in his home, and the guests were expected to reciprocate with equal goodwill toward their host.

The fact that two opposing parties were gathered at this meal should not present alarm. Rather, it should be a sign of goodwill and good faith, that the heir to the throne had humbly come to pay his respects to the governor. The meal is meant to show that the potential king had submitted to God's plan for Babylon to take over and appoint a governor, and the rightful king was cooperating in patience and in full unity.

This meal was fitting with the main message of God through Jeremiah, which is the title of this sermon *True Hope by Exile*. And that is stated more fully in the main point of this sermon: **Once the exile started, true hope was found only by submitting to God's plan of exile and restoration, which pointed to the true King Jesus, and His death and resurrection.**

These two sides were breaking bread together. One side was false hope – the overly-patriotic idea of rising up and grabbing a sword and taking back their city. The other side was true hope – following God's humbling plan for sinners, which was to accept exile now, knowing that restoration was coming. A beautiful scene, to have two sides dining together in peace, right?

Do you know what can ruin a beautiful banquet, and a serene scene? Sin!

What sort of sin? The sin of false hope. The sin of putting our hopes in the wrong things. Not submitting to God's way. Not listening to God. Not obeying God. Not trusting God. The sin of lying and trickery. That sort of sin. Ishmael was a warning to us about that sort of sin in ourselves. So, our first point.

1. Ishmael faked breaking bread in unity with Babylon's appointee, and instead broke all laws of hospitality to kill Gedaliah. (v.1-3)

Verse 2, at some point right during that unifying meal, Ishmael stood up, drew his sword, and killed Gedaliah. That was like picking a fight with Babylon, because the king of Babylon had appointed Gedaliah to be governor. And it was like picking a fight with God, because God told His people to submit to Babylon.

Verse 2, Gedaliah, the son of Ahikam, son of Shaphan, is the reminder to the reader that Gedaliah came from a long line of godly men who supported the prophet Jeremiah. The loss of Gedaliah was a tragedy. For years after this, they held a fast to lament the day of his passing.

Remember the whole standoff between Jeremiah and each king?

This is all being played out here again.

Verse 3, Ishmael's next step was to kill more of his own fellow countrymen who were there, and also to kill the Babylonian soldiers who were there that day.

So, our passage is a crime scene. It is a crime scene inside of a war and foreign occupation scene, because Jerusalem had just been overtaken months prior.

Our passage is a violent mess. Instead of saying "active shooter" like we are now used to saying, they had an active slayer, who used a sword instead of a gun.

Why is this in the Bible? For our instruction. We need to learn something about ourselves. We need to learn to recognize the flesh and how it functions in our own hearts and lives. We are like Adam. We are like Ishmael. We are like Herod. We are like Zedekiah. We are like Judas, in our sin nature.

So, we have an assassination that took place during a meal. It is in the Bible because it shows us who Ishmael is. Ishmael would not listen to God. Ishmael was operating in his sinful flesh. Whenever we are tempted to disobey God, we can read this chapter and imagine a mini-movie of the damage we do, when we disobey God. Not that we are likely to commit such gruesome violence, but the impact of our sins have a wide-reaching effect. Rather, we all live in community, and what we do has an impact across our whole community. We all have the same two choices as Ishmael. Obey God or not. Jeremiah 17:9, "*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?*"

Fast forward to a future moment in Jerusalem. The days of Jesus. We read recently in the Christmas story from Matthew chapter 2, how King Herod was threatened at the news that a baby would be born as the King. He tried to kill Jesus when Herod killed many boys across Bethlehem. Now fast forward 30 years to the

later days of Jesus when in Matthew 26, Jesus sat breaking bread with His disciples. Jesus said, “*He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray Me.*” What did Judas do? Judas Iscariot, like Ishmael of old, betrayed his master while they were having a meal together. It was then that Jesus lovingly showed what was in God’s plan. Right then, Jesus instituted the gift of the Lord’s Supper. Jesus is the One who will never betray us, the one who the opposite of killing us, will save us. The Supper of Jesus displays not death, but life. Jesus died for our sins, that we might live. That is true hope.

2. Ishmael lied and faked weeping in repentance and faked placing hope in God afresh, in order to kill 70 worshippers! (v.4-9)

Verse 4, we now have a serial killer. Ishmael woke up the next day, and 80 men had come from the countryside areas on their way to make an offering to The LORD. They were responding to the exile with repentance! They were turning to God, as they should do! Finally, Jeremiah’s preaching had a proper reaction! Here came 80 men in grief over the spiritual situation of their country.

Verse 5, these men are from 3 places Shechem, Shiloh, and Samaria, all three were important cities in the north. They knew the temple had been destroyed, and yet the location of the temple was still considered sacred to the LORD. So, they were coming with worship to offer to God in their Old Testament ways – showing grief over their sin with beards shaved, clothes torn, and grain offerings and incense to bring as they were seeking The LORD.

What did our serial killer do? In verse 6, Ishmael faked joining the worshippers and faked grieving over his sin too, by fake weeping as a trick to approach them, those unsuspecting people. Then, Ishmael lied when he said, “*Come to Gedaliah.*” Ishmael of course knew that the previous day Ishmael had killed Gedaliah! Those poor people fell for it.

Verse 7, after the 80 people were led into the city, 70 were killed and their bodies were thrown into a cistern, which was a large hole in the ground for storing water or grain.

Verse 8, the only people that Ishmael spared were 10 of the 80 men who had supplies he needed, which they offered as a bribe to save their own lives. This shows us that Ishmael was not killing people out of some holy principle. He was willing to spare people who could benefit him. He was operating wickedly.

Our second crime scene shows us something further about Ishmael. Our author is guiding us to grow a deeper distaste for Ishmael, as the chapter unfolds. Ishmael was attempting to disrupt God’s plans for restoring His people after the exile. How beautiful it was that God had drawn 80 people to repentance. A good start, for an unrepentant nation! But Ishmael was working against God’s plans. Ishmael was an anti-David.

King David was a man after God's own heart, and was patient, and would not kill Saul to secure the throne. David did not fight God's plans, but instead fulfilled God's plans. King David gathered such repenting people around him, and David protected their lives! David did not fake weeping with the people, but rather led them in weeping over his sins, and their sins, and even wrote Psalms of repentance, such as Psalm 51, and led the people of God in turning back to God together. Ishmael came from the line of David, but could not be more different.

This points us to Jesus, the True Son of David. We fast forward to a future crime scene that unfolded when Jesus Himself was being led away to His death, we find how different Jesus was from Ishmael. Jesus turned people to God. Luke 23:26-28, "*And as they led [Jesus] away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus. 27 And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for [Jesus]. 28 But turning to them Jesus said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children..."*"

Why did Jesus say to the daughters of Jerusalem not to weep for Him, but instead to weep for themselves? Because Jesus was innocent, and He would rise again from the dead. There was no need to weep for Jesus, who was not in spiritual danger. Jesus was holy and godly and walking in unity with God the Father. But the sinning people were the ones in true spiritual danger.

Ishmael killed those who were weeping.

Jesus told those who were weeping for the wrong reason how to weep for the right reason, and then Jesus went to the cross to save them from their sins.

Ishmael is the anti-David. Ishmael is the Anti-Jesus, the anti-Christ!

I am not making some big revelation. There have been a many anti-Christ's in world history. Anyone who is against David is an anti-David. Anyone who is against Christ is an anti-Christ. The Lord told us so plainly through the writing of the apostle John in 1 John 2:18, that "...*many antichrists have come...*"

Who are they? People who lie about repentance. People who fake worship. People who disobey God. People who lead God's worshippers away from God. People who fake weeping. People who spiritually are like dry wood. People who have no idea how to lament for a person, how to lament for themselves, how to lament for a nation.

This chapter shows us that a society that will not listen to God, will descend into deep disorder. We are living in that. People will not listen to God the creator, when He designs male and female, and when He designs marriage, and when He asks us to support life, not end lives. People are serving themselves, not serving God, not serving others. Water cisterns are not supposed to be filled with dead

bodies! Something was off. We have similar scenes in other generations. When people will not listen to the Creator God, then public life enters total disarray.

This story of mayhem reminds us of the days of the Book of Judges. What was the core problem there? Each person did what was right in his own eyes. What is another way to say that? Each person did not do what was right in God's eyes. Each person did not listen to God. Each person did not obey God.

3. Ishmael opposed God's plan by taking captives, then escaping to join the opposing force, leaving God's people to struggle with fear and flee where there was no hope. (v.10-18)

In verse 10, when we are told that among the slaves that Ishmael took were the daughters of the previous king, we can also safely conclude that among the slaves that Ishmael took probably was Jeremiah, and also Jeremiah's scribe Baruch.

What was Ishmael's plan? The phrase "*to cross over*" in verse 10 means that when Ishmael was going to the Ammonites, it was not just for a visit. He was leaving and re-aligning with another army against God. To cross over to the Ammonites meant to oppose God and God's plan and God's people.

In verse 11, we can trace how God began to respond by raising up a mini-deliver. A mini-David, a mini-hero named Johanan, who rescued some of God's people. In verse 12, there was someone to stand up to the wickedness at the location of the pool of Gibeon. In verse 13, the people rejoiced. In verse 14, the captives of Ishmael returned because of Johanan. In verse 15, Ishmael escaped with 8 men, while back in verse 1, he had ten men. Ishmael must have lost two soldiers. In verse 16, Johanan looks like King David when he gathered the remaining soldiers, women, children whom he brought back from Gibeon. But the people were still scared after what Ishmael had done. Verse 17 says that they intended to go to Egypt. Verse 18 says they were afraid of what the Babylonians would do in retaliation because Ishmael had killed the leader appointed by Babylon.

Egypt represents a false hope. They should not turn to Egypt. They have learned that lesson previously in our study of the Book of Jeremiah!

They must have been scared, but they should have remembered anyway, that there is no hope in Egypt. There is true hope only in the Lord God of Israel, and He had instructed them to submit to the invasion of Babylon. Yes, even now that Babylon would be stirred up, they should trust in God and submit to His plan through the forces of Babylon. This was no time to turn away from God and God's plan, and through fear turn to Egypt. There was no true hope in Egypt. True hope was in God's plan of exile to Babylon followed by returning back home.

Who can we follow? 1) We cannot follow Governor Gedaliah, because he was not wise in taking the counsel of those around him regarding his safety. That

resulted in him dining with the enemy, and being murdered. 2) We cannot follow Ishmael and fiercely resist Babylon and fight for independence, because Ishmael caused a bloodbath. 3) We cannot follow Johanan, who opts for Egypt, because fleeing to Egypt is never acceptable with God. We must follow God alone, whose spokesperson Jeremiah has been saying it for decades – listen to God. What is God saying? God is saying that the people must submit to God’s plan for exile and submit to Babylon, Babylon’s king and Babylon’s representatives. The only hope for Israel was that after the judgment of exile God gives restoration, and after God’s judgment of crucifixion, God gives resurrection. Never are they to turn to Egypt. Never are they to become brutal fighters. Never are they to assume all people are good, and throw caution to the wind. Instead, they must realize that God is serious enough about sin to send His people to exile, and God is merciful enough toward His people to give them mercy of restoration. The people must trust the God who sent them Jeremiah. The people must trust the God who would send them Jesus. God is merciful enough to send them Jesus, and God is serious enough about sin to put Jesus to death. After crucifixion, God is powerful enough and just enough to bring resurrection to Christ, and by faith in Him, resurrection to all of us. Who can we follow? We follow the True King Jesus by faith. How do we follow? We trust in Him, when mayhem breaks loose. We obey God, not our own sense of what to do. We turn to God to protect us, and we never turn to Egypt or the Ammonites to protect us.

Conclusion: God warned that all other hopes are false hopes; the only true hope for Israel was that after exile was restoration, and after crucifixion was resurrection.

Concluding applications:

1. Don’t be so shocked to see acts of ruthless depravity in our generation when people slaughter and massacre other people. Don’t be naïve like Gedaliah was naïve in chapter 40 to ignore the warnings about assassination, and chapter 41, to sit down at dinner with the man threatening assassination. Don’t make the second mistake of Gedaliah. Not consulting Jeremiah. Why didn’t Gedaliah ask Jeremiah for input about Ishmael? Why don’t we turn to the Bible for understanding of our constant string of active shooters. We are naïve. Are you ready for the explanation of active shooters? These sins of hatred and violence have resided in the heart of man since Adam and Eve were removed from the Garden of Eden, and Cain killed his brother Abel, when Cain was supposed to be his brother’s keeper. This is how the apostle Paul explained it to young Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:2, that people will be “...*lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal...*” And the list goes on. Then Paul wrote to Timothy how Christians are different in verse 10, “*You, however, have followed my teaching, my*

conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness...(v.14) continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it..."

2. We need to learn to recognize the flesh and how it functions in our own hearts and lives. Jeremiah 17:9, *"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?"* Our own fallen human natures deceive us and mislead us. This chapter is a story of the flesh at work. This chapter is a reminder that you cannot overcome your own lies on your own. Your own heart lies to you. You are telling yourself lies! Chapter 41 is a mirror in which we see ourselves. Our sin nature is reflected with shocking clarity. We can do a lot of damage to ourselves and others! We can be eating a meal with others, and smiling, and the next minute, we can rise from the table, draw our sword, and begin a slaughter. This chapter reveals what is tucked away in our hearts. Have you ever been furiously angry? Have you ever hated someone? Have you ever spoken against someone? God said to Cain, before the murder – *"sin is crouching at the door; its desire for you, but you must rule over it."* Genesis 4:7. In the next verse, Cain killed Abel. We cannot rule over our own sin and our own hearts. We need a Savior! I have good news for you!

3. Put your hope in Christ crucified and risen again for us. All other hopes are false hopes. Here is how Paul put it in Romans 2:4, *"...do you presume on the riches of [God's] kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?"* God is calling us to repent and turn to Christ and believe on Him alone as our only hope. Even in the most desperate of times throughout the Bible and history, God has always kept His promises for His people. Listen to how Paul put it in 2 Corinthians 3:18, *"...we all...beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another..."* Our hope is not that we are better than other people, because we made a good decision to be better than other people. No, that is false hope and pride. Rather, our hope is that we as the same wicked sinners as everyone else, are being transformed by Christ into the image of Christ from one degree of glory to another. We are being converted and sanctified. That is our hope! What does God want us to do? Repent! Turn to Christ alone. Trust Him. Put your hope in Christ crucified and risen.

4. Expect that the church will continue, despite the crumbling of society. Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, *"I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."* Even after severe consequences come upon a people, they will not change. Chapter 41 of Jeremiah shows that even in the tragic story of sin and decline, after sin and exile, people are not changed. However, the church is upheld. The church is purified. The church receives God's protection and blessing.