

## **Jeremiah 29:11** ***Our Future & Hope in God***

“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.” - Jeremiah 29:11 (NKJV)

### **Introduction**

I once met a friend whose wife was diagnosed with cancer. I asked him how the situation was. He said, “Well, I thank the Lord that it was an early detection. I thank Him that through a personal connection, she was able to get the earliest possible surgery. I thank the Lord that all this happened at a time when my schedule was not so tight, and hence, I could attend to her. I thank Him that she needs only just four cycles of chemotherapy as compared to as many as eight for some others. I thank the Lord for those cancer survivors whom He has led to minister to my wife.” All this time, he was talking with a calm and composed voice that was filled with so much hope.

I asked him if he was coping okay. He added, “She is having some very bad side effects after her first chemo. She finds it difficult to sleep at night. I just sit up with her, just to be with her. I remember our marital vow to be there for each other—“for better or for worse; in health and in sickness.”” Again, he was talking with so much hope of better things to come.

I remember that when I paused to pray for him, I didn’t feel heavy in spirit because I was praying for someone who felt so helpless and hopeless. Rather, I felt a lightness of spirit because I was praying for someone who felt so much helped and hopeful in the Lord. Indeed, my friend’s words of thanksgiving and optimism were all said not in the context of very positive circumstances in his life. Rather, they were said in the context of much prevailing pain and suffering in his family.

It is the same context of pain and suffering in Jer 29:11. Yet it is a verse that’s filled with so much promise of hope in the future. No wonder it has been rated as one of the best-loved verses in the whole Bible.

To properly understand Jer 29:11 we need to know something about its background.

- It was written to Jewish exiles in Babylon who were forcibly removed from their beloved Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar.
- They were dispossessed of their homeland and possessions, and lived far away in exile.
- All their dreams and hopes had been smashed.

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- They wondered deep inside themselves, “How could God have let this happen? If we are truly His people, how could we end up here? Has God forgotten us?”

The Jewish nation in that frame of thinking made two mistakes:

- The mistake of false hope—they thought they would never end up in Babylon. And this brought about the danger of expecting what God had not promised.
- The mistake of hopelessness—they thought they would never get out of Babylon. And this brought about the danger of disbelieving what God had promised.

The promise in Jer 29:11 must be understood and claimed with a right appreciation of the context in which it was written—i.e. when life was in the dark valley, not on the mountain top. When life is in the dark valley, God seems to have let us down—He does not do what we expect Him to do. But it is when life is in the dark valley that we must constantly remind ourselves that God will always do what He promises He will do.

When Jer 29:11 is understood in its right context of pain and loss, then what it says about what God has promised He will do would grant us strength and encouragement. One promise of strength and encouragement is that ...

### **I. God is always thinking about us.**

The Lord says in Jer 29:11, “I know the thoughts that I think toward you.”

Just imagine—the Almighty God thinks about you and me all the time. He not only knows us. He keeps you and me in mind all the time.

We are routinely preoccupied with things we do and forget the people closest to us. Even if we do remember, it is often the bad things—we remember the hard times and the insults against us. So we end up nursing grudges for years against wrongs done to us years ago.

When my late mum suffered a mild stroke in 2004, she was in a state of mild dementia. She lost much of her mobility and became very much homebound since.

One of the things I tried to do was to speak words of faith into her. One Sunday, I decided to lead her in the Lord’s Supper at home. I took the bread and asked her, “Do you remember what the bread represents?”

She answered, “The body of Jesus.”

I took the cup and asked again, “Do you remember what the cup represents?”

She answered, “The blood of Jesus.”

I said, “Good. Now, can you pray—ask Jesus to forgive your sins before we eat the bread and drink the cup?”

She answered, “But I have forgotten how to pray.”

So I led her in a prayer of confession and thanksgiving before we took the elements together.

She then said this to me, “I may forget how to pray to Jesus. But Jesus still remembers who I am.”

Indeed, we human beings may suffer from dementia. But the Lord never suffers from amnesia—He remembers and thinks of us all the time, even when we have Him out of our mind because of our busyness, or sickness, or disobedience.

In the same way, God the Father never forgets those He loves. He said this of Himself through the prophet Isaiah with these words, “... I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands ...” (Isa 49:15-16 - NIV).

Isn't it a comfort to know that God remembers us? God will never forget us.

Even when we do have good thoughts about people, we tend to forget them after a while. That's why we say, “Out of sight, out of mind.” Think of the many “best friends” you have in your past. How much have you remembered them? Or how much have you forgotten them?

But God never forgets His people. God reassures us in Jer 29:11 this way, “I have been thinking about you.” It is as personal as that. He not only has plans for us, but He thinks about us. Often times, when someone has plans for us, we end up as instruments to be used and not persons to be loved. But God is saying to you and me today, “You have not been forgotten. I am thinking about you always.”

- The Jews in exile really needed to know this.
- They were in exile in Babylon, far from home.
- They were carried away against their will.
- They were under the control of a foreign king who could do what he liked with them.

The exiled Jews needed to know this because of what they already know in v. 10—that they were to be in exile for 70 long years. The good news is that it meant they wouldn't be in Babylon forever. The bad news is that 70 years is a long time.

But God says, “You think I’ve forgotten about you. You are here not because I have forgotten you. You are here because you have forgotten me. Yes, I am judging you for your disobedience, but it will not reduce my love for you. You are always in my thoughts and on my mind. You are still my people. I have not forgotten you.”

Because God is always thinking about us, He knows what He is thinking even when we don’t know what He is doing.

We said, “Lord, what are you doing? What is happening makes no sense?”

But God knows what He is doing even when His thoughts are hidden from you and me.

He has you and me always on His mind.

We may struggle with so many difficult questions in life. But remember this is sure—God is thinking about you and me always.

When Jer 29:11 is understood in its right context of pain and loss, what it says about what God has promised He will do would grant us strength and encouragement. A second promise of strength and encouragement is that ...

## **II. God thinks good towards us.**

The Lord says in Jer 29:11, “Thoughts of peace, and not of evil.”

God is thinking of us. But what is He thinking when He thinks about us? Jer 29:11 answers clearly—“Thoughts of peace, and not of evil.” A modern translation puts it this way—“Plans to take care of you, not abandon you” (MSG).

Remember that Jer 29:11 was given to the Jews while they were in Babylon. It was to give them hope; to remind them that they were not forgotten; to reassure them that their days in Babylon would not be forever.

God said to the exiles ...

- “I sent you to Babylon.”
- “I am thinking about you while you are in Babylon.”
- “I have not forgotten you in Babylon.”
- “I am with you in Babylon.”
- “I will give you a future out of Babylon.”
- “I will bring you home from Babylon.”

It is God saying, “I still love you even though you have messed things up. I still have for you a great future. And the future starts now, not 70 years from now.”

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The next time something in us tells us that God has no good thoughts towards us, remind ourselves this—God cannot have evil thoughts towards His people for He only thinks good towards them. The God who gave His own Son to die for us cannot think anything but good towards us.

But what is God trying to do when he allows His people to go through trials and suffering?

There are several answers:

- God is trying to purge us of sin and purify us.
- God uses suffering to test our faith. Will you trust, obey, and serve God when things aren't going your way?
- God uses times of difficulty to humble us. When things are going well, we tend to get puffed up by our own successes. God let the dark valleys to bring us on our knees before Him.
- God uses hard times to prepare us to minister to others. He comforts us so that we may comfort others.
- God uses hard times to prepare us for a new understanding of His character—to discover His grace and goodness in a way we have never experienced it before.

All these may be nothing new to us. We know them all along, at least in the head. But the problem is that we often forget them until life hits rock bottom.

The strength and encouragement that comes from Jer 29:11 is this—even when life hits rock bottom for us, God is not throwing rocks at us. Instead, He is still thinking about us, and thinking good towards us.

Thomas Edison was working on a complicated invention called a “light bulb”. It took a whole team of men 24 full hours to put it together.

The story goes that when Edison was finished with this light bulb, he gave it to a young boy, who nervously carried it up the stairs. Step by step he cautiously watched his hands, obviously frightened of dropping such a priceless piece of work.

When the young fellow reached the top of the stairs, guess what happened? He tripped, dropped the bulb, and it broke into pieces. It took the entire team of men another 24 full hours to make another bulb. Finally, tired and ready for a break, Edison was ready to have this second bulb carried up the stairs.

He gave it to the same boy who dropped the first one. This young boy probably had felt so utterly useless after that disastrous drop. When he dropped the light bulb, it seemed that his whole sense of worth had also dropped to rock bottom. When he thought of himself as the one who caused the destruction of the first light bulb, Edison still thought of

him as the one who could still be trusted to carry the second light bulb up the stairs. Edison still had good thoughts of the young boy.

That's more than a picture of forgiveness. That's how God still have good thoughts of us even when we see ourselves as a big failure; when life seems to hit rock bottom for us.

(<https://bible.org/illustration/thomas-edison-0>)

When Jer 29:11 is understood in its right context of pain and loss, then what it says about what God has promised He will do would grant us strength and encouragement. One last promise for us today is ...

### **III. God intends for us a future with hope.**

The Lord says in Jer 29:11, "To give you a future and a hope."

The KJV puts it this way, "... to give you an expected end." God has an appointed end for His people, and nothing will hinder them from reaching that appointed end. Though the exiles could not see it as they were under Babylonian domination, 70 years down the road the same God who raised up a pagan king (Nebuchadnezzar) to judge them would raise up another pagan king (Cyrus) to deliver them.

The end the exiles expected would come, but not in the way they expected it. They would see the end that God always intended for them. God always finishes His purposes in and through us!

Jer 29:11 teaches us that God thinks of us, that his thoughts towards us are good, and then when His purposes have been completed, He will lead us to reach His appointed end for us. This is our hope of a future in the Lord.

God will not conveniently exempt us from the "tough times" of life. That may not sound like music to our ears. But know this—we will not be in these tough times a second longer than is necessary. When our trial has come to its appointed end, we will come out of it, and come out of it stronger than before.

What does this mean when we live in a fallen world of imperfect people, including ourselves? It means no matter where we are now, our attitude ought to be one of ever-present hope in the Lord. We are not yet what we could be or should be. But in Jer 29:11, God promises to lead us out of darkness into light. Indeed, we are not people of darkness but people of light.

When we read a verse like Jer 29:11, we need to ask ourselves, "What difference does being a Christian make?"

- We suffer as others suffer.
- We get sick.

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- We face trouble.
- We are not immediately delivered out of hardships.

Jer 29:11 reassures us that the Christian's life is one of hope even though we are not exempt from the trials and pain of life. Our two greatest enemies here on earth are sin and death. We experience and see their power in our fallen world every day.

But God has given us a hope in the face of these two enemies—He had totally defeated both sin and death in Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ, we are brought into God's family. And if you put your faith in Jesus Christ, you become a member of God's family; you become a child of God.

God is placing us in this fallen world for a purpose—to be His light in this darkened world. In His timing, God will bring us to a better place in heaven. If we believe that, then we will watch, work and wait patiently in our fallen world in spite of all its imperfections. As for now, "Babylon" is where God wants us to be in rather than "Jerusalem" as we wait for the day when we finally go home.

If our way is dark, keep believing that the Lord is with us all the way, all the time. We are not home yet, but we will be. God has intended for you and me a future with hope in His presence forever.

## Conclusion

How do we as God's church demonstrate this hope today?

- *By persevering in our obedience to Him.* Absolutely needed in the ongoing life of the church is the power to keep going in the path of obedience. And for many of us that will mean long-haul perseverance even when the limelight, the attention, the glory, and the admiration are all gone. Where does perseverance come from? It comes from hope in the Lord. We do not live in a time that puts a high premium on persevering in devotion to God, people and duties. So, transience becomes a key feature today in relationships, work, and ministry—many things are only for short-term, and you really can't achieve much if you are not ready and willing to take the long-haul.

The church needs to recover her steadfast hope in the Lord.  
Steadfastly hope. . .

- not in human greatness
- not in the approval of men
- but in the sovereignty of God at work

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When we do that, we shall persevere in the path of obeying God, even when the limelight shifts away from us, when the praises of men are no more, and when our human expectations are yet unfulfilled.

- *By sharing our message of hope.* The best that Babylon could offer the Jewish exiles were no match for what God had promised His people when they returned to Jerusalem. In the same way, the best this world can offer us are no match for what God has promised His people when they are in His glorious presence in heaven when the appointed end comes.

As Christians, we have a message of hope for this world. We know that the world is going somewhere. It is not all futile, meaningless and vain. As Christians, we have a hope that is not based on futile religion, but based on the Person of Jesus Christ. As Christians, we know Jesus Christ as the Judge, and for us He is not a judge who condemns, but a judge who rescues. Knowing Jesus the Judge is the only hope there is for this world darkened in sin. The world is looking for a light of hope. You and I have this hope to share it and to spare it. As we look at the world through the eyes of God, let's be moved to share the hope we have in Jesus Christ. Tell them in Jesus Christ ...

- God always thinks of people
- God has His goodwill for people in His thoughts
- God intends for His people to have a glorious future in heaven forever in His presence

There may be some here this morning who are feeling that life on earth has nothing much to look forward to—you are born, you live, and you die ... that's it. If that is you, then I want you to know that there is hope for the future and beyond life on earth. If you want to be part of this future and hope, the only way is to get to know Jesus Christ. Without Him your life will end in meaninglessness, futility, and hopelessness.

I urge you to approach and talk with any Christian whom you know or whose life has been an encouragement to you if you want to know God's purpose to give you a future and hope in Jesus Christ. It is God's desire that you receive this future and hope that He has purposed for you in Jesus Christ. Amen!