

Seeing Crisis through the Eyes of Heaven

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We are in the midst of a pandemic with the COVID-19 virus. And as you know, it's impossible for us to turn on our televisions without hearing news of this crisis. Our minds are being bombarded with harsh negativity that can very easily create fear, panic, and anxiety within us.

I want to respond to this crisis, and share with believers, a biblical perspective on all that is happening in our world today.

In times like this, it's very easy for us to be consumed by fear. There's so much that we don't know, and as a result our imaginations can run rampant with the question, *What if?*

Our minds, which function like computers, can crank out endless scenarios to answer that question for us. This, in turn, can run our emotions into overdrive creating such panic in us that we're in danger of allowing what we *don't* know to overshadow the truth of what we *do* know.

We know that God is on His throne. We know that He loves and cares for us. We know that He is omnipotent and more than sufficient. And we know that we are never alone, never unloved, and never left to live in this world without all that He has promised. Christ is available to us at the moment of faith. We know these things. We have studied our Bibles, heard the sermons, and read the books. Yes, indeed, we know that God is for us and that nothing can prevail against us. As Paul told us in that great eighth chapter of Romans, "*What then shall we say*

to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?" Romans 8:31b (NASB)

But, we need to bring what we know to the forefront of our minds so that we can push back all the things that are presently bombarding us and taking up the Supreme place in our thoughts. As physical beings living in a physical world, it's so easy for us to allow the physical, visible world to dominate our minds. The Apostle John said this about it, *"For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world."* 1 John 2:16 (NASB)

We have to take action. There are actions we need to take right now. We need to follow the advice of medical professionals by practicing social distancing and washing our hands. We need to do the things we're being told to do. But with all that we see, taste, touch, hear, and smell in the physical realm, we can very easily miss that there's a whole other world out there. The world of the spirit. The world that we cannot see. There is an incredible example of this in the Old Testament — a story about a very precious man named Jeremiah.

Babylon had just conquered the nation of Israel. The city of Jerusalem had been leveled. Its buildings burned to the ground and its people carted off as slaves. Jeremiah was one who escaped the carnage; yet he returned to Jerusalem and sat

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among the ashes of his once beautiful city. He smelled fire. He smelled death. And it was crushing to his spirit. Bodies were laid all over the city. None were spared — men, women, or children. The shrieks and screams of the wounded and the survivors pounded his brain. Everywhere he looked, all he could see was devastation.

Overwhelmed, discouraged, and hopeless, he began to write a lament. His words would be an expression to the outside world of what was happening on the inside of a man who found himself in a very precarious position. This may sound strange to you, but I love what he wrote. Now, please don't misunderstand me when I say that because what he wrote is sorrowful, painful, and full of fear. But what I love about it is the honesty of it. Jeremiah openly expressed what so many of us feel in perilous times.

Here is my paraphrase of what Jeremiah wrote In the third chapter of the Lamentations,

I am the man who has seen affliction. I am in darkness and not light. My flesh and skin are old and my bones are broken. My circumstances are oppressing me. I'm walled in. There's no way out. I'm laden down with chains. I'd cry, but no one will hear my cry. I'd shout, but not even God hears me.

Jeremiah felt as though there was no way out of his situation — only God could help him — yet at that moment he felt like God was strangely silent. He moved into paranoia, which is often what happens when we find ourselves in trouble. Jeremiah said,

I feel (feel being the keyword) like God is against me. Like He's waiting to ambush me. I feel like I'm the bullseye of

God's arrows. I had hope in God, but now they all laugh at me.

So often what we *feel* is not in line with what is true. God has promised to never abandon His children. But to Jeremiah, in this moment, God feels distant. He continues,

I have no strength. I have no peace. I have no hope.

Wow. My friend, have you ever felt like that? If you're human at all, you most likely have. You may even be feeling like that right now as we're facing this pandemic and perilous time. Fortunately, Jeremiah continued to write. The Holy Spirit refused to let his story end there and went on to provide us with incredible insight through him... As Jeremiah continued to write, he repeated a key insight in the text so that we wouldn't miss it...

In verse 19, Jeremiah says, *remembering my affliction*. Then, in verse 20, *my soul still has them in remembrance*. I have to ask you, did you see it? Did you see it, my friend? Jeremiah reveals that at that moment he had his eyes fixed on all of the affliction and all of the trouble that he was facing in his sin-cursed world. Now before you excuse him, and yourself, for doing so — because that's so easy to do when conflict and pressure, turmoil and sickness come our way — we must remember these important words from the book of Colossians, “*Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.*” Colossians 3:2 (NASB)

The Holy Spirit told us to set our minds; and the Holy Spirit will never call us to do something that we cannot do. My friend, we may not have the power to keep thoughts from coming into our minds, but we do have the choice as to whether or not we will allow them to remain there. As Martin Luther once said, “You

cannot keep birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair.” It's one thing to have a thought; however it's quite another to invite it to sit down for a cup of tea — and that's what many people are doing right now. The media is pouring out negative thoughts and we're inviting those thoughts to sit down for a cup of tea with us. In turn, those negative thoughts are causing fear and panic.

What Jeremiah experienced was very real. We don't want to minimize it. Just like what we're experiencing right now is very real. Devastating events cause hurt, sorrow and fear; but that is only part of the story. As I said earlier, there's a whole other world out there. The Corinthian letters call it the “unseen world” — a world, that I would suggest, is of a greater reality than the physical world we see. It's the reality of the spirit. It's the reality of God. And my friend, by faith, it is a world we can experience right now!

Jeremiah needed to take the physical world around him and see it through the eyes of the spirit. Yes, planet earth is real; but see it through the eyes of heaven. See what is going on today through the eyes of a God who has promised to never leave you or forsake you.

Now, let's not miss what Jeremiah did next.

After he remembered his affliction and observed all the

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all the devastation around him, he made a choice. He chose to put something else in his mind. He resolved to stop thinking about the horrible events around him and says, *“This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope.”* Lamentations 3:21 (NASB) He sets his mind on the God who loves him and confessed, ***It's only because of God's mercies that we are not totally consumed. God is compassionate and He is merciful. He is good to those who seek Him and He is faithful. This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope.***

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This hope that Jeremiah had, this biblical hope, is not a hope that says, “Oh, I *hope* something happens. I *hope* I win the lottery.” **Biblical hope is confidence. It says, “This is what I know to be true.”**

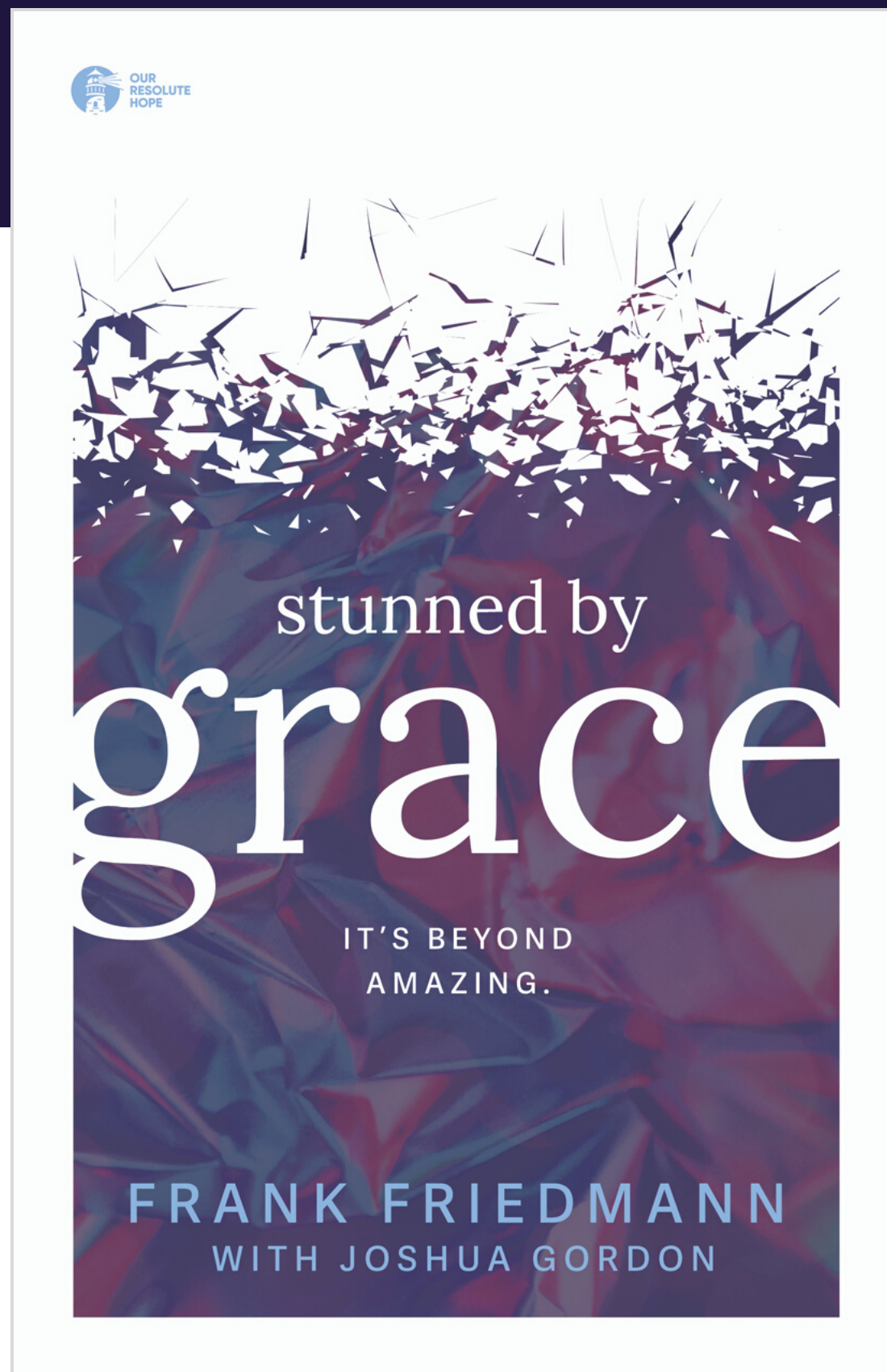
Jeremiah changed his mind. He set his mind on the Person of God, the promise of God, and the character of God; and something changed. Please understand, it was not Jeremiah's circumstances that changed but rather, Jeremiah himself. Jeremiah was still sitting in the rubble. He could still smell the smoke. He could still hear the anguished cries. He could smell the death that was all around him. But Jeremiah was changed by recalling to his mind the faithfulness, mercy, and love of God. He knew that what he was going through was not the end

of the story. He found the strength to endure the day and the hope he would need to face tomorrow.

Are you discouraged and fearful of what's happening around you? Have you lost your hope? Do what Jeremiah did. Replace the thoughts of what's happening around you in the physical world and set your mind on the spiritual. Take your eyes off planet earth and choose to see the world we live in through the eyes of heaven. With an act of your will, choose not to focus on the peril that's surrounding you but rather the

Person of God. **The God who has promised to love, care and provide for you in such a way that nothing will ever be able to separate you from Him.** With our hands placed in our Father's hand, His promise is that we will walk through this valley of the shadow of death we are in, and come through to the other side, basking in the glory of the love, care, mercy, and faithfulness of God. I offer this to you in resolute hope. With faith in Him, stand firm.

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