

DIGGING DEEPER



God's Gotcha: Held in the Hand of a God Who Is Never Surprised

23 Aug 2026

What does it mean to truly be held by God, even when life feels like it has fallen completely apart? This message takes us on a sweeping journey through some of the most dramatic moments in Israel's history, revealing a God who not only knows the ending before the story begins, but who speaks the names of people who have not yet been born and describes events that will not unfold for centuries. We explore the staggering prophecies of Isaiah, written more than 200 years before a king named Cyrus ever drew breath, and we discover that God was already calling him by name, already outlining his role in restoring a broken people. The central spiritual lesson is both humbling and deeply comforting: nothing that catches us off guard has ever caught God off guard. The messes we find ourselves in, whether through our own choices or through the weight of circumstances beyond our control, were never outside of his awareness or his plan. Jeremiah 29:11, that beloved verse so often quoted in isolation, is placed back into its full and honest context here, reminding us that God's plans for hope and a future are spoken precisely into seasons of discipline and waiting, not only into seasons of ease. This is a message for anyone who has ever wondered whether they have wandered too far, failed too completely, or waited too long.

1. Pastor John describes God as having a plan that extends far beyond what any individual can see, even naming Cyrus 220 years before he was born -- how does this kind of long-range divine foreknowledge change the way you think about the difficult or confusing seasons in your own life?

2. God called both Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus 'my servant' even though neither acknowledged him -- what does it mean to you that God can work through people and circumstances that seem entirely outside of faith or obedience?

3. Pastor John reflects on a personal season of failure where he felt disqualified from his calling, and then realized that God was not surprised by his mistakes -- have you ever experienced a moment where you recognized that your worst failures did not catch God off guard, and how did that realization affect you?

4. Jeremiah 29:11 is often quoted in isolation, but Pastor John points out that it was spoken in the context of 70 years of captivity and hardship -- how does understanding that context reshape the way you receive or apply that promise in your own life?

5. Israel was told to build houses, raise families, and pray for the peace of their captors even while in Babylonian exile -- what does this teach us about how God expects his people to live faithfully in circumstances they did not choose and cannot immediately escape?

6. Pastor John draws a distinction between God saying 'I gotcha' as in catching someone in a mistake, and 'I've got you' as in holding someone securely -- which of these expressions of God's presence do you most need to hear right now, and why?

7. God chose Israel not only to bless them but to make them representatives of His character and love to the surrounding nations -- in what ways do you think the church today is succeeding or struggling in that same representative role?

8. Pastor John describes seeking God as being like playing hide-and-seek with a grandfather who wants to be found, drawing from Jeremiah 29:13-14 -- how does this image of God actively making himself findable challenge or encourage your own pursuit of him?

9. Throughout the sermon, nations that seemed permanent and all-powerful -- Assyria, Babylon, Media-Persia -- rose and fell, while Israel endured -- what does this pattern of history suggest to you about where lasting security and identity are actually found?

10. Pastor John says that Israel sometimes followed what they knew to be untrue because it was more convenient than facing the truth -- in what areas of your own life might comfort or convenience be leading you to accept something you know does not align with God's Word?

Remember...

"I was absolutely shocked. I couldn't believe that I would make some of the stupid decisions I did. I was absolutely shocked. But God wasn't even surprised. Which means... that if he trusted me before, knowing my foolishness, just maybe he could trust me again."