

Christ in Prophecy
Jesus in the Old Testament 33
Hope in Despair (Lamentations)
Key Verses: Lamentations 2:11, 3:22-23
Special Guest Joni Eareckson Tada

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Opening

Tim Moore: Welcome to Christ in Prophecy. Nathan and I are glad you could join us today for this episode of Jesus in the Old Testament.

Nathan Jones: Last week we looked for Jesus in the writings of Jeremiah, the so-called prophet of doom. I don't know about you, Tim, but I'm glad that we're not called to proclaim a message so filled with despair that people call our ministry doomsayers or that we are prophets of doom.

Tim Moore: I agree of course, but there are some who do dismiss the message we share as too foreboding or gloomy. Some people don't want to hear that the wrath of God abides on them if they reject the salvation offered by Jesus Christ. And, stating plainly that unimaginable horror will descend upon the world during the Tribulation does not endear us to people who choose that fate either.

Nathan Jones: That's true, but thankfully we point to Jesus Christ our Blessed Hope. He is going to be the light that drives away all our darkness. Now, we've left the period of the kings of Israel and Judah, from roughly 1000 to 600 BC. The era was a sad commentary on the decline of a nation that originally had pledged itself in a covenant relationship to Almighty God.

Tim Moore: Jeremiah's book of laments captures his heart-break at witnessing the ravishing of Jerusalem and the people who refused to repent of their faithlessness and wickedness. Written shortly after the fall of the city in 586 BC, it is the saddest book in the Bible. It contains horrors almost too graphic to read. But, even as he expresses the bitterness crushing his heart, Jeremiah clings to the mercy of God, expressing hope in the midst of despair.

Interview with Joni Eareckson Tada

Tim Moore: On that note, our guest today is a living testimony of hope. Refusing to wallow in despair, she overcame unexpected adversity and serves as an exemplar of faithfulness. Joni Eareckson Tada's life changed in an instant when she dove into Chesapeake Bay and broke her neck. At the tender age of 17, she became quadriplegic. But to cite Jeremiah 29:11, "God had a plan for her, to give her a future and a hope." Joni, you've been a heroine to my wife, Amy and I for many years, since we were young teens, and I'm so delighted you could be here with us today.

Joni Eareckson Tada: Oh, Tim and Nathan what a joy to be with you both. And of course, to all our viewers today, so honored to be on the platform with you.

Tim Moore: Well, ma'am it is really our honor and blessing for all of us including our viewers. I want to observe that when you were confronted with a calamity, it is not unlike all of us who at some point or another will experience at least a minor calamity, and it is only human nature to sometimes dwell on our pain and our loss. And without dredging up too many painful memories, tells us, and tell our viewers how your accident affected you initially both spiritually and psychologically.

Joni Eareckson Tada: Well, as you can imagine I was utterly devastated. Seventeen years old. Athletic. On the go. Ready to head to college. And I had asked the Lord Jesus right before I went to college orientation if He would please do something in my life to bring me closer to Him. I knew that college would have its temptations, and so, I wanted a closer walk with Jesus.

Now, I prayed that prayer right before high school graduation, and not but two weeks after my graduation from high school I took a reckless dive, thoughtlessly into shallow water. My head hit the bottom of the sandbar, it crunched my neck back, smashing my vertebra and severing my spinal cord. And Nathan and Tim, I cannot begin to tell you the despair I felt, especially I had just asked God to give me a closer walk with Jesus. And I remember being in the hospital bed thinking, "Lord, Jesus if this is your idea of an answer to prayer to be drawn closer to you, I'm never going to trust you with another one of my prayers again." I was devastated and I plummeted into depression. But thank the Lord there were Christian friends who were praying.

Real quickly friends. When people ask me: "Joni, what should I say, what should I do for this person who just suffered a catastrophic injury or illnesses?" My first response is prayer because we wrestle not against the flesh and blood, of spinal cord injury, or other disabilities, no we wrestle against powers, and principalities that would love nothing more than to keep us steeped in depression. So, I thank God for Christian friends who were praying for me back then.

Nathan Jones: Well, praise the Lord. Most people might not know, at least now the younger generation, there was a whole movie dedicated about your life and experience if they want to know more about your testimony. But I've always wondered, obviously it can be a very despairing situation when you don't have access to your body anymore. Was there a particular Bible verse, did you hear the still small voice of the Lord? What kind of helped you keep going and help you be an overcomer? Because you clearly are an overcomer.

Joni Eareckson Tada: Well, in my depression there was one Christian friend who pulled up a chair by my hospital bedside and he said, "Joni, I know you want to get out of your despair. Let me give you a Bible verse that can be your anchor. Start here." And then he quoted to me 1 Thessalonians 5:18, "In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."

And I remember saying to my friend, "What?! No way. I'm not going to do that. I don't feel thankful. I'd be a hypocrite if I did that." And he wisely said, "Joni, let's read the verse today, it doesn't say in everything feel thankful; it says in everything give thanks." There is a really big difference between trusting God and having trustful feelings. So, push your emotions aside. Push away the box of Kleenex. And just take a deep breathe, a step of faith, and start giving thanks.

And so, I did that, Nathan, I just started mouthing thankfulness. I really wasn't thankful but I wanted to be obedient. And so, I started thanking God that my hospital bed was near the window at least. I thanked God that my family was supportive. I thanked God that people were

coming to visit me. I thanked God that after so many months I was finally able to sit up in a wheelchair. I thanked God for the breakfast that they would serve on my side of the hospital hallway first because that meant it was warm. All kinds of things I started giving thanks for.

And those small obediences, those drastic obediences of giving thanks, really exercised my muscle of faith. And over time I began to feel thankful. I believe it was God's reward for my faithfulness in His Word, you know relying on His Word. He gave me the emotion of thankfulness. So, I would point to 1 Thessalonians 5:18 as the one that really kicked started me on the path of righteousness and back to God.

Tim Moore: Well, Joni so many people will see your physical limitations, and they are obvious and apparent, but you have, as Nathan said, been an overcomer. Many people in our society today carry deep emotional and spiritual scars. How can we be sensitive to the hurt and suffering that is happening in lives all around us, and yet point people to the kind of faith that you are exhibiting?

Joni Eareckson Tada: Well, I think again, as I said at the onset pray for these people. And don't pray sporadically, pray committedly, diligently, and specifically. Come alongside them. I mean I had friends who were faithful in visiting me on a regular basis. And they not only brought their Bibles, they brought their guitars, they brought pizza. When I got a weekend pass they took me to a local mall. They did things with me. They just embodied the gospel of Jesus. They didn't just preach at me, they loved me. And of course, love is a verb, it does things. And their expressions of love got me back into the mainstream of life.

But also, I think it is important to be realistic. I mean gentlemen, I've been 55 years in this wheelchair, this July it will be 55 years, and I live daily with chronic pain. I don't sleep very well because I am often awakened by pain. And there are mornings, actually on most mornings, I wake up and before my eyes are even opened I'm saying, "Oh, God I cannot do this one more day. I'm so tired of this pain. I don't have the endurance. I can't do quadriplegia anymore. But Jesus I can do all things through you, as you strengthen me. Lord Jesus I am empty. I am cavernous. I need your filling. I can't do one hour without You. God help me." And you know what? It is the way God loves to pour out His grace of people. He resists the proud, that is he resists those who hit the alarm, jump out of bed, throw back the covers, take a shower, scarf down breakfast, and race out the front door on automatic cruise control without hardly giving God the tip of the hat of a quiet time. He resists those people. But He gives grace to the humble. And the humble are simply people who wake up in the morning realizing their desperate need of Jesus. And it's how I've lived the past 55 years in this wheelchair, which makes my smile pretty authentic and not made of Colgate for sure.

Nathan Jones: Well, let me tell you how much of an inspiration you've been to me. My father used to take me to book trade shows in Nashville, and I remember looking up to you and watching you paint. I can't even draw a stick figure, and you are painting with your mouth. Shows how young I am because I am looking up at you in a wheelchair. And then years later when my youngest son was diagnosed with autism, I ran into you at a convention and you stopped everything and gave me information about Joni and Friends. And we've been supporters of your ministry for 15 years or so now. So, I just want to tell you that your overcoming has been an inspiration to so many people, especially my wife Heather and me.

Joni Eareckson Tada: Oh, Nathan thank you. And since you mentioned my drawing with my mouth. I am going to ask my friend to hold this up in front of the camera.

Tim Moore: Oh, wow that is beautiful!

Nathan Jones: Wow.

Joni Eareckson Tada: There you go. I drew that when my occupational therapist encouraged me in occupational therapy to just draw something that expressed my feelings. And so, I drew that face. And it is a face of oh, God I've got to do this. This is the way I'm to live my life? But I think it is not only my portrait, it is everybody's portrait. At times we all say, God I can't do this. This is my life? How am I going to manage? And so, that particular charcoal drawing you just saw, I sneaked it in front of the camera, pretty much expresses where I was at the time of my injury. And oh, the difference the Lord Jesus has made. And it is why that particular charcoal drawing is one of my favorites, it reminds me where I have come from, and the power of the grace of God to change things.

Nathan Jones: Wow.

Tim Moore: You remind me of what happened when Jesus spoke at the synagogue in Nazareth. He proclaimed a Messianic passage that was fulfilled in the hearing of the people sitting there that day. But the rest of Isaiah's prophecy that He did not read pointed to a time when the Messiah would indeed fulfill the rest of the portion which says that the Messiah would bestow "a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair." And that is so evident in your life. And yet, as we look into Lamentations, this book of lament and despair, the prophet as well has a moment when he glimpses the hope that exists even in the midst of despair. So, in those kinds of times of trial and despair what can Lamentations and Jeremiah the prophet teach us today?

Joni Eareckson Tada: Well, I tell you Jeremiah, and we all know that verse from Jeremiah 29:11.

Tim Moore: Yes.

Joni Eareckson Tada: We all probably have it embroidered and put it on a plaque on our walls. "For the Lord knows the plans He has for us, to give us hope and a future." And yet, Jeremiah wrote that as the people of God were being dragged off into slavery to spend the next 70 years in abject subjection to rulers, and domineering tyrants. It was not an easy time for them.

But you mentioned Lamentations, which of course is also written by Jeremiah and I love Lamentations chapter 3, verses 21-26, this is so hopeful. He says, "But this I call to mind," okay, whenever your suffering, whenever you are hurting, Lamentations 3:21, "This I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The Lord's great love will keep me from being consumed, for His compassions never fail they are new every morning." Okay, right there great is God's faithfulness. "I say to myself, 'The Lord is my portion I will wait for Him.'" Call to mind the goodness of the Lord Jesus and that He is especially good to those who hope in Him, to the one who seeks Him every single morning.

Nathan Jones: That is amazing.

Tim Moore: Beautifully said.

Nathan Jones: It reminds me of Jeremiah because Jeremiah just saw Judah destroyed by the Babylonians, the people taken away. And he is lamenting. And this is God's tough love. For

hundreds, and hundreds of years of rebellion against Him and breaking their covenant God shows them tough love. But in the midst of that Jeremiah offers hope that the Lord is giving. It is kind of a dichotomy isn't it? We've got tough love, but we also have God showing tough hope. How can we have that tough hope?

Joni Eareckson Tada: I love the way you put that, Nathan, tough hope. Because I think that hope is best described also in Lamentations chapter 3, verses 32-33. These are the anchors for my life, okay, these two verses changed my life. It says, "Though He," that is God, "though He brings grief, He will show compassion so great is His unending love." Now, get this, "For He does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone."

So, right there in that one little Bible verse, Lamentations chapter 3:33 that really reflects the heart of God. Though He allows grief and affliction to touch us, He doesn't do it willingly, that is He doesn't do it from His heart. He did not want my diving accident to occur in the sense that He enjoyed it, or got a big kick out of it, or oh, boy this girl is going to neck, now let's see what I can do with that. No. No. No. Suffering and affliction when it comes to us by His overarching will, and foreordained plan, suffering is something that really He takes no delight in.

And that one little Bible verse, Lamentations 3:33 I think it reflects the heart of God like nowhere else in the Bible. Because think of it the book of Lamentations, get this, is divided into five chapters, and the first two chapters are each comprised of 22 verses. And the last two chapters also have 22 verses in them. However, the middle of the book is chapter three, it comprises 66 verses. Now, here is the intriguing part. The exact middle of that chapter is verse 33, He does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone. Wow. I mean that Bible verse falls in the exact middle of the entire book of Lamentations, it is right at the apex of the entire book.

And I think there is a good reason why, because when it comes to suffering, whether it was the suffering that the prophet Jeremiah was speaking of to God's people, or the suffering that God might allow in our viewer's lives, God wants us to know that He has the heart of a Father. We may not understand His ways, but He definitely wants you to understand that He has the heart of a kind and compassionate Abba Father Daddy. And it doesn't make Him happy to see us hit with hardship. But oh, my goodness it does make Him happy when He sees all the things He can do in your life in it, and how He will encourage others through it, if you would but trust in Him and believe that His mercies are new every morning, and great is His faithfulness.

Tim Moore: Certainly.

Nathan Jones: Excellent. Well, Joni when your life changed when you were just 17. Tim and I both a heart for the youth today, they seem to be losing hope. The student life conference you did once you said this "God has not redeemed us to make us happy and healthy; He has redeemed us to make us like Jesus." How would you then encourage the youth to be grounded in the Blessed Hope?

Joni Eareckson Tada: Well, I would say to young people today, you can believe in God, you can say you believe in God. You can say that you follow Jesus, but when suffering hits you hard next time, watch how you respond to it. Because suffering will reveal the essence of everything you believe about the God of the Bible. And make no mistake when we sign up in the army of Jesus Christ there is no small print in the contract, we are going to go through sufferings. The road to calvary, to the cross of Jesus Christ where we lay down our sin, and where everyday we experience something of the death of Jesus so that we might also know the power and the life

of Jesus in these bodies of ours, that is a quote from 2 Corinthians 4:12. The Christian life is hard, very hard. So, don't be disappointed by those afflictions.

Second Corinthians 4:8 says, you are going to be hard pressed on every side, but it says it will not crush you. Oh, friends I think about that Bible verse almost every night when I wake up at 2:30 in the morning, 3:30 in the morning, 4 AM, 5 AM in pain. I say to my pain you're hard pressing me on all sides, but the Bible says my loving Father says, you are not going to crush me. You are not going to crush me. So, I am going to believe my Jesus. My feelings think that He is giving me way too much, more than I can handle, but I'm not going to believe my feelings, I'm going to believe Jesus and His Word. And though I am hard pressed on all sides right now at 4 AM with this pain, I know for sure it is not going to crush me because I've got Christ who is with me. He is Immanuel with me in my suffering. Oh, that young people today would grasp that and understand it, they'd make giant leaps forward in their walk with Christ.

Tim Moore: We are trying through this series, Jesus in the Old Testament to emphasis the power of the entirety of God's Word, the Old Testament grounding us in our faith and pointing to our coming Messiah both in His first advent and His glorious second coming.

You actually wrote the forward to the New Living Translations One-Year Pray for Life Bible. And your words touched my heart. This is what you said regarding the eternal Word. You said, "Your hand will fuse with the Sword of the Spirit. You will become one with the Word, and it will be your mark of valor and distinction. Others may cower as the culture of death moves through the earth like a dark, poisonous cloud. Others may retreat from the frontlines. Some may collapse in fear before the enemy, overcome by anxiety and overwhelmed by battle fatigue." There is the pain you refer to even. "But you will stand firm on the frontlines, holding fast to Scripture and winning victories for the cause of life and for our King." And I can just say, wow, Joni, you would make a great battlefield general right there.

Joni Eareckson Tada: Well, I'll tell you where I got the inspiration for those comments. I got them from Eleazar, he was one of David's mighty men. You can read about Eleazar in 2 Samuel chapter 23, and verse 10 describes it, okay, here is what happened on the battlefield. The army of Israel was up against the Philistines and they were way overwhelmed. In fact, they retreated, they high tailed it out of there. But listen to this, "But Eleazar stood his ground and he struck down the Philistines until his hand was so tired that it literally froze to his sword, and the Lord brought about a great victory that day."

Oh, friend, there might be others who run from the frontlines of suffering, but I want to stand my ground. And I want my hands, although they be paralyzed, to hold fast to the sword that is the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. I've shared many passages and verses from the Bible which are anchors, they are all for me part of my weaponry against discouragement, depression, complaining, doubt and disbelief. So, I would encourage our friends, all these Bible passages that we've talked about, and I know that you in a series about Lamentations, good on you gentlemen, get to know those Bible verses to make them the anchors for when you feel hard pressed on all sides. Get your hand frozen to the sword of the Spirit just like Eleazar.

Nathan Jones: We talk a lot here of course about the Rapture of the Church. There are negative signs of the end times, but there are also positive signs as well. What signs do you see in society that we are getting close to the return of Jesus Christ?

Well, I do think that with the advent of Jesus Christ, that ushered in the quote, the end of the age, and we are living in those last days for the past 2,000 years, we have been in the last days. And Matthew 24:12 shares a couple of signs of the times that I am really seeing. First, Matthew 24:12 says, there will be an increase in wickedness. Did you know that the 20th Century, which was just 20 some odd years ago, was the bloodiest century in recorded history? With World War I, the pogroms of Stalin, Nazi Holocausts, wars, World War II, the world never saw anything quite as vicious as the 20th Century.

So, here we are in the 21st Century and I think we are seeing an increase in wickedness. And it also says in Matthew 24 that the love of most will grow cold. I challenge, I charge our viewers do not let your love for the Lord Jesus grow cold. And the way you can keep it from growing cold is to make certain that everything you believe is put into practice. Not just for yourself, but for the advancement of Christ's Gospel among your neighbors, co-workers, college students, friends, associates. Tomorrow morning get dressed, take a shower, go out the front door and find somebody who needs help, Gospel help, and administer it through your prayers and through your hands on practice of Christianity with its sleeves rolled up, for the saving of many lives. Just like our good friend Joseph in the Old Testament.

Tim Moore: Well, Joni on that note how can our viewers connect with you and be partnered with you and become one of Joni's friends?

Joni Eareckson Tada: Well, our ministry is all about giving this Gospel I just described to people with disabilities all around the world. In fact, even as I speak we are working with our in country partners in Ukraine to get people with disabilities out of that country and into safe havens in Germany, Poland, Romania. So, if people want to be a part of this valiant effort to give the Gospel to people with disabilities around the world, they can connect with us at: joniandfriends.org, that is J-O-N-I-A-N-D-F-R-I-E-N-D-S.org. And click on our videos, see what we are doing. Come volunteer at any one of our family retreats. We always need people to help. Or you can pray for our work. Of course, people need to pray because if people don't pray nothing of any eternal good is going to happen, we need people praying. And of course, we always welcome financial supporters. So, people can learn all about who we are and what we do at joniandfriends.org.

Tim Moore: Well Joni it has been a true blessing for both of us and for our entire staff, all of our viewers for you to join us today. We do pray God's continued blessing on you, on Joni and Friends, and on all of the lives you impact around the world.

Joni Eareckson Tada: Oh, thank you so much, Tim and Nathan. God bless you. I know you have a special needs son, and so having this platform with you gentleman today has meant the world.

Tim Moore: Thank you, ma'am. Godspeed.

Closing

Tim Moore: When we were preparing for this program, we knew that exploring a book called Lamentations could be heavy. With so many people suffering and anxious about so many things, it is not our intention to accentuate sadness. But Joni Eareckson Tada demonstrates that

joy is not what we experience in this life, or in the circumstances we endure. It is what fills our heart to overflowing when we are in the center of God's will.

Nathan Jones: Our key verses reflect the span of human emotion that Jeremiah's lament captured so wonderfully. In 2:11, he describes the heartbreak of witnessing the destruction of Jerusalem as God's judgment fell on His rebellious people. We share that heartbreak as we recognize that God's wrath will soon be kindled against our nation, and every person, who is rebelling against Him today.

Tim Moore: But our second key verse testifies to Jeremiah's unshakeable faith. Because he knew the Lord and trusted in His faithfulness, his hope in the Lord's lovingkindness and compassion never wavered.

Nathan Jones: Jeremiah resigned himself to wait upon the Lord, silently anticipating the salvation He has promised. We too are waiting patiently anticipating the arrival of our great God and Savior.

Tim Moore: Joni is an exemplar of hope. Her joy in the Lord is infectious, inspiring everyone who comes into contact with her. No matter the circumstances you are enduring.

Nathan Jones: No matter the challenges you face, if the Lord is your portion, your hope in Him is assured. Until next week, I'm Nathan Jones.

Tim Moore: And I'm Tim Moore, saying, Look up, be watchful, for our faithful and compassionate God, our Blessed Hope, is drawing near.

End of Program