

“God Has A Plan For You”

A reading from Jeremiah 29:10-13 “This is what the Lord says: “When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. ¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. ¹² Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. ¹³ You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. ¹⁴ I will be found by you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.”

I have heard people say, “God must have a plan for your life?” or some variation of this. Does God have a plan for your life, one that is specific to you? If He does are you actually willing to follow it?

God does have a plan. He planned our salvation in Jesus all the way back to Genesis 3. One would be born of a woman. The Savior would be established as part of God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 12. The Savior would be of Israel from the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:8-12). The line would pass through David and sit on David’s throne forever according to 2 Samuel 7. And be born in the fullness of time to a Virgin, born under the Law (Galatians 4:4). Our God wants all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:3-5). His desire is to save all of humanity in Jesus. So, the Lord established His plan of salvation within the ranks of Israel’s history, its feasts and festivals, its Law, and its covenant. We can certainly say God has a plan for you in this regard.

We also know from Jeremiah and the prophets that Israel didn’t always follow God’s plan. Even as Moses was receiving the Ten Commandments the Israelites were building the golden calf and rebelling against God’s plan. God’s plan for a perfect world was ruined the moment that Adam and Eve disobeyed the Lord in the Garden. And in our sin God’s plan for our lives is skewed by flawed reasoning, a worship of personal idols over the Lord, and a failure to follow God’s Word. It is God’s plan for us to go to worship each week. But we don’t. It is God’s plan for us to remain humble and forgiving but we keep holding grudges. It is God’s plan to be generous and faithful with our gifts but we often hoard them and skimp on supporting the plans of God. You get the idea. God does have a plan for us but we keep trying to rewrite it to suit our whims and desires.

That’s where Israel kept going. Israel was the sheep that never stopped wandering off. If finally cost them everything. The Babylonians roared in and devoured the Temple, the Land, and ripped the Israelites from their homes and made them live in Babylon. Those like Daniel were among them. The innocent was carried along by the sins of others right into exile. The Israelites were cast into a culture of idols, a new language, a new set of laws, and a whole lot of abuse by the Babylonians. The goal of the Babylonians was to saturate the Israelites so much with Babylonian culture that is left no room for their roots, their Sabbath, the Law, or their Lord. Can we say it is any different today? American culture has become less and less Christian and works harder and harder to crowd out our time with Jesus and our faith in Jesus. And yet, Jeremiah says to the Israelites, settle in. It’s going to be 70 years before you see the Land of Israel again. But all is not lost. It’s where it needs to be.

And yet God’s plan for the Israelites had not changed. In the midst of Israel’s fall the Lord reminds them, “¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” Interesting words. Is it ‘prosperous’ to lose everything to the Babylonians? It is if it brings repentance and reestablishes a proper faith in the Lord. It was Jesus Himself who said in Matthew 16:26, “What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?” The Lord thinks very differently about what it means to be prosperous. Our riches are in Christ which many scriptures tell us are of greater worth than gold or silver or fame or power.

And what does the Lord mean by saying, “not to harm you.” The Babylonians had caused great harm. So do the consequences for ungodly choices. Harm comes to the innocent because of choices made by ungodliness. Harm comes from disease and random troubles we cannot control. But this is not what Jeremiah means. Jeremiah means that God Himself will not bring harm to the soul. The exile was not for the sake of harm but for something good for His people, to save them from becoming completely conceited and

rebellious—to save their souls by taking away their comforts, their idols. It was to reorient them back to their Lord. As verse twelve makes known, “¹² Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. ¹³ You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.” God’s plans regardless of how they looked at that moment of exile were to save God’s people and preserve the covenant that would lead to the Savior.

And then comes this wonderful promise. The Lord, even while sinners and even while in their exile will not forsake them. He will remain with them and give them a future to hope in. “¹⁴ I will be found by you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.” In the same way, the Lord will call and gather us, scattered around the world. The Lord will call as He did to Lazarus and we will rise. We will be brought into the Father’s House through Jesus’ resurrection.

God does have a plan for each of us. God does not plan for us to get cancer, or starve or for some to be lonely. He never planned for us to have broken minds or broken hearts or to die in our sin. Such things are not said or even implied in scripture even though tribulation is a part of this world. The Lord does plan for us to know Him. He plans for us to believe, to worship Him, and have a future with Him. When the Israelites were carried into exile in Babylon, I’m sure they questioned the wisdom of such things and maybe God’s love for them and God’s plan for them. I’m sure those like Daniel, who were still faithful, and yet were carried off pondered similar things. When we face trouble, we may feel the same way and question the wisdom of such things. But when we turn to what is written the Lord is clear. His desire is to know us, save us, and take us to be with Him in heaven. His plan is spelled out in Jesus’ cross and resurrection. The Lord is faithful. May we always be blessed in our courage to believe in Jesus and confident in His Character in and promise.

And now the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine on you and be gracious unto you. The Lord look on you with His favor and give you His peace in Jesus. Amen.

Pastor Matthew Woods
John 3:30