

Jeremiah 29:11-13

¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to give you peace, not disaster, plans to give you hope and a future. ¹² Then you will call on me and come to pray to me, and I will listen to you. ¹³ When you seek me, you will find me, when you will seek me with all your heart.

- I. A plan that comes from his love for you
- II. A plan for your good
- III. A plan you can pray for sincerely

Sermon for Pentecost 4 (Graduate Recognition Service), June 20, 2021, St. Paul's Green Garden

Text: Jeremiah 29:11-13

Theme: "The Lord Has a Plan for You"

In the name of Jesus, Dear fellow redeemed,

What kind of plan do you have—for your summer vacation, --for your garden; for your future education; for your dinner tonight. In almost anything we do we form a plan. It may be very informal, we may not write it down, such as the plan for an everyday meal or dessert. When you are cooking, the recipe is your plan. And that might be written in a cookbook or you have it memorized, but the recipe IS the plan.

We would be very surprised if we heard of a sports team that went into a game without a game plan to deal with the other team's strengths, to take advantage of the opponent's weaknesses and keep the other team from using their own weaknesses against them. No matter whether it is gardening, cooking, playing sports or deciding on your future education, you want to have a plan. It might be very detailed, or you might want to keep it very general, but having a plan is always a good thing.

God also makes plans. You can see his plan and wise design when he created the world. The design of the human body and how all systems work to sustain our physical lives is really a miracle. King David wrote in the psalms: "**I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.**" And when you get down to the level of the cells and how they function in our bodies God's wise plan and design becomes even more amazing. How could our bodies or anything else on earth or in the universe have happened by accident?

So if God plans everything, if even we humans know how important it is to have a plan, even if it is quite simple, what about God's plan—for your life, for your future. We know that God loves each of us as the unique individuals he made us to be, so what kind of plan does he have for us? That must have been on the minds of the people of Judah when God allowed the Babylonians and King Nebuchadnezzar to defeat them and take

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them to captivity in Babylon. So God sent his prophet Jeremiah to make his plan clear to them. And the Lord also has a plan for your life: It is a plan that comes from his love for you; a plan for your good; a plan you can pray for sincerely.

I mentioned that God had allowed the powerful Babylonian war machine to defeat his people, the kingdom of Judah. But if they were his people why did he allow them to be taken from their homeland, the land God had promised would be theirs if they would be faithful to him. And that really was the problem. For four centuries, from 900 to 500 years before Christ the people of Judah had been unfaithful to God. They worshiped idols, they made sacrifices to false gods in the temple of the Lord and they counted on their own strength and power to keep them safe from enemies instead of trusting in God for all their material and spiritual needs.

They had been unfaithful to him, but he still loved them. He had not withdrawn his promise to send a Savior for the world through their nation. But instead of worshiping things that are not gods, instead of loving their own strength and cleverness, instead of believing that they had produced their own wealth and prosperity, God wanted them to look to him. He wanted them to be a nation prepared and ready to receive the Savior when he came into the world. So it was out of love that God used the Babylonians as his instrument to take his people captive. He wanted to get their attention. And when he had it, he spoke words of love to them: **I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to give you peace, not disaster, plans to give you hope and a future.**

Their army had been soundly defeated, eventually Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed and God's people may have wondered, "What do we have left." So God told them, "I have a plan for you, in fact, I have it all planned out for you right now." He told them, after seventy years I will bring you back, and I will send the Savior into the world. That was God's real love for them. He wanted them to trust him alone and to be ready to repent and receive the Savior.

God's plan for you and me always includes the Savior. When you graduate from high school or college, it might feel like you have the world by the tail. OR it might feel very scary. It is easy to forget about God and think, "nothing can stop me now. I have it all figured out." Or we might be tempted to forget about God and think that there is no way I can make it in this dog eat dog world. And whether you just graduated, or your graduation is more than a few years in the past, we can still easily give in to the idea that I have to do it myself and we forget about God. But God has a plan for your life and it is a plan that comes from his love for you. He made you his child at baptism. He claimed you as his child. And 2000 years ago he sent HIS SON to be your Savior. And yes, there may very well be times of prosperity and times of trouble. But your Lord, in his plan for you, always carries things out in your life because he loves you. His plan for you surely includes discipline, training, so that you are even better prepared to go through this life looking to Jesus and trusting that God has you in his care. That means his plan is always a plan that has your good in mind.

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Remember the man Jacob in our first lesson this morning. He had done some terrible things to his father and his brother—lies, deception, trickery. His brother wanted to kill him. So his mother warned him to leave home and go to find a wife from her relatives. Now Jacob believed in the promise of the Savior; but after what he had done maybe he wondered if God still loved him, if God was still going to send the Savior through his family line. That is when God sent him the vision of the ladder reaching from earth to heaven with the angels of God walking up and down on it. And from heaven God declared that he would be with Jacob and bring him back to the land he had promised to his descendants. What that meant is that God was going to send the Savior into the world through Jacob's family. God still loved Jacob and had forgiven him. His plan for Jacob, having to run from home was for Jacob's good.

And so God's plan for the people of Judah centuries later was also for their good. They were far from their homeland, far from the land that God had promised to their forefather Jacob. But they had been unfaithful to God by worshiping false gods, praying to them and sacrificing to them. Now they needed to learn that God is serious about obedience to his commands, particularly his command to worship him in truth. But one day, God promised he would take them back to the land of Judah. There they would rebuild the temple that Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed. They would rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. They would repent of their sins and once again worship, sacrifice to and pray to the LORD. By this captivity God was preparing his people to be the nation from which the Savior would be born and complete his work to save the human race from sin, death and the devil.

So when your plans seem to go haywire, when it seems that nothing is going right, whether it is a project at work, or home or an assignment you have to complete at school, any other plan, remember, sometimes God allows our plans to fail or helps us change the course of our plans for our good. Now, to you and me it may not seem very good at the time. But remember, God loves you because you are his child. And it doesn't always mean our plan was bad, or foolish. But God has a better plan.

When I was in high school my family had planned a camping trip to Canada for our vacation. And I really was looking forward to that camping trip. But the weather promised to be very rainy and drippy in Canada all during the time of our planned trip because of the leftovers of a hurricane traveling up the east coast and extending well into Ontario where we had planned to go. So at the last minute, as we are in the car, my parents suggested we go south to Iowa and Missouri and see some things there that we had never seen. Later we were glad we had done that because it turned out to be a pretty good vacation. It was a small thing in the wider scope of our lives, but it has helped me remember that when God changes our plans he does so for our good.

And when our plans do seem to go wrong, haven't we blamed God for those things? Haven't we forgotten that God loves us and sometimes allows our plans to fail or go awry, so that we look to him, so that we remember that nothing happens in life without

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his blessing. And we forget that sometimes if it seems our plans have failed it is because God has a much better plan for us and he will bless us with his plan. He always does things for our good, because he loves us. Since this is true our God also wants us to pray for everything sincerely.

Our Lord wants us to seek him with all our heart. That means he wants us to pray sincerely, not with a false heart or a pretend sincerity. And our sincerity is part of our over all attitude about God. When I sin do I repent and seek his forgiveness in Christ? Is my heart devoted to the Lord so that I endeavor to do his will in my life, that is, to obey his commands because he has graciously forgiven me?

This means we will need to be in God's Word regularly, both in worship and in our personal study of his Word. Our Lord guides us with the truth of his Word. He teaches us how he wants us to live our lives. His word is so important because when we listen to him in his Word then we also know better how to pray. I have heard people say, "I don't go to church, but I pray." But how will you know what to pray unless you are listening to God?

And be assured that when you pray to God with all your heart he promises that he will hear you and will answer you. The New Testament writer James says, "**The prayer of a righteous person is able to do much because it is effective.**" That is another way of saying, "God hears and answers the prayers of his children." We should understand that God NEVER ignores our prayers. He always answers them, even if he says NO, or Wait a while, or I will give you something better.

When you pray, you are putting God in the equation. When you do that, your plans will not fail. God may change your plan, he may delay your plans, he may open a door somewhere else for a time. But with God all things are possible because he has a plan for you that is best and according to his gracious will.

So, yes, we should always plan as best we are able. Sometimes it is difficult to plan in an emergency. But that is the time when we especially want to seek the guidance of our Lord, to put everything in his hands. Then we know and believe his will, will be done. And when he accomplishes his will for our good and out of his love for us then we can sincerely thank him for blessing us as he always does for the sake of Jesus who died for our sins and rose from the grave to give us eternal life. Amen.