

## ***Jeremiah 29 :11-13***

***For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for wholeness and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. 12 Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. 13 You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.***

This is a wonderful refrigerator verse that I am sure most of us know by heart.

It sounds wonderful and we are happy to quote it and to apply it to our own lives and circumstances.

We've heard it said that God loves us and has a wonderful plan for our lives. It's easy to agree *when we like the plan.*

But let's take a step back and consider the reason and purpose of this Divine promise.

Sometimes, God's plan turns out to be different than what we were thinking. Some of you began 2022 with a positive attitude confidently claiming the promises God has for you, your family, and your careers. But then, the rug got pulled from under your feet.

Maybe you have a job that you really like. A job that you're good at. But one day, the boss says, "Hey, we need to make some changes. We're going to have to let you go." And you go home and say, "Lord, what is happening? I thought I was where you wanted me to be! I thought I was doing what you wanted me to do! What is going on?"

Sometimes, God's plan is different than what we were thinking.

Or maybe someone you love is fighting cancer. You were counting on God to come through for your family just like He always has. You were counting on a miracle!

But one morning, the doctor calls back with the test results that you don't want to hear. Sometimes, God's plan is different than what we were thinking.

Over the next 2 Sundays, we're going to see what God is accomplishing through plans in our lives even if those plans aren't what we were expecting.

And then we will see how we should respond to God's plan for our lives.

Let's start by looking at this verse in context.

In looking through YouTube at videos regarding this verse, I saw several that said that this verse is not for us.

One of the things that I learned about hermeneutics, or how to study the Bible is that you have to read it understanding who it was addressed to and what it meant to them first. The other thing that I learned is that all of Scripture has an original intended audience, but as the Apostle Paul says,

***2 Tim 3:16-17***

***“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”***

Therefore, it has a secondary audience in mind, meaning you and me.

Over the next couple of weeks, we’re going to look at both.

## **Faith in His Promise**

Here is the situation the people of Israel find themselves in. The Babylonians have attacked Jerusalem. They’ve taken 3000 prisoners back to Babylon. Including the king, the court officials, and the craftsmen. And the Jews are saying “This isn’t supposed to happen to us! We’re the chosen people! We’re the apple of God’s eye! What is going on?”

Today, we’re going to see what God is accomplishing plans in our lives even if those plans aren’t what we were expecting. And then we will see how we should respond to God’s plan for our lives.

The Jewish people have a beautiful history of God coming through for them in times of crisis. In Exodus chapter 3:7, the Lord told Moses that ***“I have seen the misery of my people. I am concerned about their suffering at the hands of the Egyptians. So, I’m going to bring them out of the land of Egypt.”***

And that’s exactly what happens. In Exodus 14, God brings them through the Red Sea. 40 years later in Joshua 24, the Israelites inherit the Promised Land. God’s plan was accomplished in the lives of His people.

And in 2 Kings 19, the Assyrian army invaded the land of Judah. The people were scared. The commander of the Assyrian army said, ***“No one can deliver you out of the hand of the King of Assyria. Surrender to us now, and we will let you live!”***

But Hezekiah prayed to the Lord. And that very night, an angel of the Lord went out and put to death 185,000 people in the Assyrian camp. Almighty God had come through once again! God’s word was accomplished in the lives of His people.

And so, when the Babylonians invade the land of Judah in 586 BC, the captives are thinking, “This isn’t going to last long. God is going to come through for us like He always does! The false prophet Hananiah said in Jeremiah 28 that in two years, God will break the yoke of the king of Babylon, and we will be free! We’re coming back home! Praise God!” This tickled the ears of the captives, and they believed it.

But in Jeremiah 29:1-6, Jeremiah writes a letter to the captives in Babylon. And basically, he says ***“You’re not coming home for a while. Build houses and settle down. Plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters. Be fruitful and multiply.”*** In other words, “You’re not ready to go home because I have plans for you right here in Babylon.”

What is the true promise of God. We hear what we want to hear. We need to truly listen to God even when His promise is not what we want to hear.

## Content in His Purpose

### ***Phil 4:11-13***

***Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content . 12 I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. 13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.***

Like the Jewish people in this story, we too are living in a world that is not our own. But we're not ready to go home because God has plans and a purpose for us right here in Babylon.

It is not an accident you are where you work. It is not an accident that you are attending the school where you study.

God is working out His plan in your life. He wants you to live for Him in this place until he calls us home to the Promised Land.

And then in verse seven, Jeremiah says, ***"seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."***

And the Jews would have been thinking, "You want us to pray for the community that carried us into captivity? Jeremiah, have you lost your mind? These people are the enemies of God! These are the people who ransacked the city of Jerusalem! How can you ask us to pray for these people?"

The key that will set the course for how you will enjoy God's blessing this year will be YOUR ATTITUDE!

You have a choice to either allow the circumstances and people this year to make you bitter. Or like the Apostle Paul you can choose to, *'focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead,*

Don't dwell on the past, don't grovel in your mistakes, don't be embittered by your failures. Learn from them, let them go, and move on into the promise and the purpose God has for you this year.

We love quoting Scriptures that fit what we want them to say. We love verse 13 where it says, ***"You will seek me and find me..."***, but we conveniently forget about the rest of the verse where he adds the qualifier, ***"when you seek me with all you heart"***.

## Patience in Waiting for the Fullness of Time

In verse ten, God says something else that would have gotten the Jews riled up. He says, *"When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place."*

When we read this verse, we think, "Wow, that's beautiful. In seventy years, God is going to bring the people back to the Promised Land. That's awesome!"

But the Jews were thinking, "You mean we gotta live in this rotten country for the next 70 years? Most of us are going to be dead by then! What kind of a plan is this, God?"

But then I thought of something this week I had not seen before. God is specific in telling Israel that they will return in 70 years. Why 70 and not fifty. After all, fifty is the year of Jubilee when Israel is to celebrate the deliverance of the Lord.

To put it simply, God is reminding Israel, and us that ultimately, He is in control of times and seasons. He is in control and aware of all that is happening. We call this God's providence or His Sovereignty.

God is working out His plan and purpose:

**Romans 8:28**

***And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.***

God is reminding us, there is not a promise HE has given that He will not fulfill, in His time and in His way. Our job is to simply to trust and obey His plan.

**Eph 1:7-10**

***In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 8 which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight 9 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.***

In this new year God wants you to be reminded that He is faithful. God will do what He says He will do.

Let me close with this story.

When I moved to Florida I was frustrated because despite His calling to the ministry I seemed to be no closer to being a pastor than when I first got the calling. The only job I could get was as a maintenance man at an office building complex. What was worse was that first thing every morning I had put on soundproof headphones, strap on a gas blower and blow the leaves and trash from the parking lot and sidewalks. It was a loud, dirty, hot, sticky job which I absolutely hated. One day as I was complaining to the Lord, He spoke to me. He told me that this was all a part of His plan and that He wanted me to redeem the time I had on this job.

The first thing was to stop complaining about blowing the parking. I got a good pair of stereo headphones and connected them to a CD player. That way I could listen to worship music while I was blowing. The other benefit was that nobody bothered me or assigned my jobs while I was blowing.

The second thing was that I walked through each and every office each day checking for lights and other maintenance problems before anyone reported them. I got to know all the staff by name, and they got to know me as the Reverend, and they would stop me in the halls to ask for prayer. In essence, they became my flock. It wasn't the kind of ministry I was expecting, but I got to share the Gospel with a lot of people who never would have gone to church.

God was fulfilling His promise to go into ministry and showing me His purpose in having me work as a maintenance worker. Later, I helped plant the Clearwater Vineyard, became the Associate Pastor, and was ordained in 1997 in the fullness of time.