

The Plans I Have for You
Jeremiah 29:4-7, 10-14
(Prophesied 626-587 B.C.)

Jeremiah has been called the “weeping prophet.” He was a sensitive soul who had a very difficult job—telling the truth in a time of terrible heartache. God called Jeremiah and gave him his message of doom for Judah and Jerusalem. Jeremiah knew that he would be opposed from the very first, that his message would be unpopular and his critics would be fierce.

We draw a caricature of the prophet, however, if we see only God’s judgment on a wicked people. Jeremiah retained and proclaimed a theme of hope and expectation. Ultimately, he knew that God’s plans for his people were good plans of peace and prosperity.

All people are sinners. We tend to worship what we make with our hands. We impute to these careers, objects, and relationships ultimate meaning and purpose. When they are shown to be what they always were—false idols unworthy of worship—we fall into despair. Jeremiah is calling us all to faithfulness to God. God has planned a good future for his people despite the difficulty of the moment. God alone is worthy of our worship. Put your trust in him, and watch how he unfolds the good things in your future.

God is speaking. He is using the first person singular pronoun as in the subjective mood—I. He is also using the second person pronoun in the objective mood—you. These five verses are a discussion about I and you. This is the heart of the biblical message. God is the subject of creation and history. He has called forth a people who are the object of his grace and favor.

We do not always want to start every sentence with the pronoun I. It gets old. Sometimes I will go back and edit sentences in an article to eliminate the personal pronoun as subject. I am also reticent to always be referring to you as the object. The wording sounds like a put-down. I am the subject, you are the object. The subject is the one who performs the action. The object is the one who receives the action. The subject is active. The object is passive.

We must receive this grammatical construct as truth even though it may be disturbing to us. God is self-centered because he must be. He is the center of the universe. Any other center would be an idol and a lie. Everything begins with him.

We humans are not the center of the universe. Truthfully, nothing begins with us. God is the great initiator. We are the responders. We are response-able—responsible.

I. [Build Houses and Cities](#)—Seek the peace and prosperity of the city—v7

***We cannot read this instruction from Jeremiah without something resonating in our hearts as people of New Orleans. God is calling us to a prolonged work of restoration. That work will pass through many hands before it is done. It will not be completely done even in the next decade. So we must move out of crisis mode and learn to plant gardens again. We must settle in for the long haul.

***The long haul of my life has been New Orleans. I visited one of my boyhood homes two weeks ago. It was only one in a succession of houses I lived in as a child and then as an adult. I remember arriving in that house and wishing that I was back in El Paso. I so wanted not to be there. But God used one of the prophets, Ezekiel, about whom you will hear next week, to help me understand that this was a move he was making for me. I was to go.

Look here in my Bible from 40 years ago, Ezekiel 3, and the verses in green. This is how God moved me from one place to another and reconciled my spirit to that move as a boy.

A. Jeremiah is being honest about the future for this generation taken into exile in Babylon. It is going to be 70 years before they return to the Promised Land. He is correcting the false teachings of some prophets who are telling them they will return to the land shortly.

B. Jeremiah is encouraging them to build houses and settle down. They are to marry and give their children in marriage. They are to plant gardens. They will live long enough in Babylon that they must treat that strange place as their home rather than grieving the loss of their homeland.

C. They must work for the peace and prosperity of Babylon. That seems strange to say given the fact that Babylon is their conqueror and their captor. Yet it must be so.

***Daniel and the three Hebrew children will illustrate this principle later on. Many Jews will rise to position and power in the Babylonian Empire during these coming years of exile. They are doing so because they are obeying the admonition of Jeremiah to seek the peace of that city.

II. Believe God's Promises and Plans—v10-11

A. God's promises are gracious—I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place—v10

B. God's plans are for prosperity, hope and a future--I know the plans I have for you—v11

***Does God have a plan for my life? Many people have asked me that question. I cannot help but believe that for every single person in this room, God does have a plan for your life.

***I asked my father during our recent visit if he had anything he would do differently in his ministry. We were playing pool, and he is pretty good. He said to me, "There are no regrets in the Bible. We trust God day by day."

We are not to live with regretfully, wishing that we had done things differently. Forgiveness is our way out of regrets.

God is powerful enough to modify his plan for our life. Even if we mess up, and we do, he has a great plan waiting for us still.

III. Make Prayers and Searches

We are glad to see in verses 12 and 13 that we actually become the subject of the sentence. We get in on the action, so to speak. God is the object of our affection, the destination of our prayers, and the desire of our hearts.

A. Our prayers are calling, coming, and petitioning: You will call upon me and come and pray to me—v12

1. Calling out to God—desperation, cries for help and mercy
2. Coming to God—this is drawing near, seeking his face
3. Petitioning God—this is addressing God with our needs

B. Our searches are whole-hearted or they are futile—You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart—v13

1. God requires that we search for him. He knows where we are. We are lost and looking for him. We are never out of his sight, but he does not short-circuit our search.

***I felt badly about Rebekah missing our street in the twilight after a jog on the levee. She and her friend, Beth, were right there on the levee. Janet and I saw them. We thought about taking them our bikes, and almost did, but decided that they were coming in. It was getting dark. We cycled to the house thinking they were right behind. But they entered the neighborhood two streets to the west of our street. And no single street cuts through from there. You have to turn here, turn there. It was more than thirty minutes before they appeared at the house.

We were watching them, and they were searching, but we did not know it. God is watching us in our search and our struggle. He is always present, always watching. We know this in our heads.

He is encouraging us, allowing us, to search for him. The NEED for him has to build in us.

2. These are not “Google” searches. Finding God is not about typing g-o-d into google.

3. God is not playing hide-and-seek with us, a pointless, frustrating exercise that could be avoided. We must seek for him because it is the only way that we truly find him.

As the deer pants for the waterbrook, so my soul pants for thee, O God—Psalm 42:1

4. These are desperate searches for the ones you love—like a mother anxiously looking for a lost child or a businessman searching for his misplaced briefcase.

IV. Experience God’s Deliverance and Restoration—I will gather you from all the nations—v14

***I love the family gatherings. We had one of sorts this week. We were able to kick back and visit with our granddaughters as well as Tony and Rachel. We gathered on the levee. We gathered at the ball game. We gathered around the table.

A. Our God is a gathering God. He gathered his people again and again in the OT like a shepherd gathers the flock of sheep. In the New Testament he initiated the “church” which is the “called out assembly,” a gathered community of believers.

B. He gathers us back from captivity. Everyone should hear this today no matter the nature of your imprisonment.

C. He gathers us for the purpose of restoration. I “will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.”

Conclusion: We serve the God of second chances. When Peter asked how many times he should forgive his brother, he suggested seven times as a sufficient measure of grace. Jesus replied, “Seventy times seven.”

We are to forgive our offending brothers over and over again, time without number. Why would we do this? Because this is how God forgives us. We are only returning to him what he has given to us. We are to have the same forgiving spirit in our dealings with others that we have experienced ourselves in the saving grace of God.