

Jeremiah Chapter 29 v 11 (A)

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Date: 12 July 2015

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[0 : 00] We read from Jeremiah 29, it'll be helpful for you to have that first half of the chapter open in your Bibles because we'll be picking up some of the thoughts and themes there.

Well, I believe in church anniversaries. I think they're great and I think all anniversaries are great because they're times to celebrate, to remember, to give thanks to God. And I'm so grateful that we have this opportunity to celebrate here, again, God's goodness. But anniversary, of course, is an opportunity to look back, isn't it? An opportunity to look back on the years, but also to look forward to the next 12 years, till the next anniversary. Whether that's a church anniversary like this, or it's a wedding anniversary, or as we thought with the children, a birthday, or even just a private anniversary from something special to us or personal to us.

One thing, of course, is certain that at any anniversary, as we look back over whether it's 42 years, or 10 years, or 5 years, or 15 years, or however many years it may be, even one year, we can see that much of what has happened has not been as we planned. Much of what happened over those years was not what we expected. Now, I know there are a few folk here who were here 42 years ago. I was alive 42 years ago, unlike some people here, but I wasn't involved in the church then. But some of you will look from 42 years onwards and thought, and you can see, well, we didn't expect to be where we are now. We didn't expect those things to happen, that happened, those good things or those sad things. There were times in our lives where there were problems, difficulties, sorrows, losses, cancellations, illnesses, all number of things.

Unexpected surprises, we might say, that throw our lives into chaos for a little while. There's no way we could have planned or foreseen what would have happened. But of course, there is only one person whose plans are always fulfilled. Only one person who always brings about what he purposes, and that is the Lord our God. And the verse particularly I want us to pay attention to this morning, and again, later this evening as well, is verse 11 of Jeremiah 29. Here is God, he's speaking to his people, and he says to them, for I know the plans I have for you, who declares the Lord. For I know the plans I have for you. Some of the other versions say, I know the thoughts I have for you, but that really isn't as helpful as plans, because clearly God is speaking about the future, talking about what's to come. So plans is a good word. I know the plans I have for you. And this one line, as I've said already at the introduction, is just part of a letter that God instructed the prophet Jeremiah to write to his fellow Jews who were in exile in

Babylon, hundreds of miles away from home. We see that at the beginning, verse 1. Text, letter, prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders, so on and so forth. Other people, Nebuchadnezzar carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar was the king of the Babylonian Empire, the emperor really of the Babylonian, biggest empire, the biggest, most powerful force in the world at that time. He had conquered lots and lots of nations, and included in that was this little kingdom of Judah. What was left, as it were, of what was Israel, the southern part Judah, the Jerusalem at the center of it. Conquered them, and he had taken away lots of people. Daniel, if you read the book of Daniel, he's one of the people that were taken away. All the intelligent people were taken away. You and I would have been left behind, but all the intelligent people were taken away. The gifted people were taken away. The artisans, the nobles, they were all taken away into exile. And you can understand why, at this time, those who were in exile and had been taken away were very confused and discouraged. In one sense, a letter was sent to encourage them and to give clarity and help them to understand their situation. And we understand that. A letter can really cheer you up, can't it, when you're having a hard time? But this is a letter sent to these people of God. Because of what happened, they were very confused. And one of the things they were confused was because there were these false prophets, these men who were going around making promises that God would end the exile and all the problems would be over

very quickly, and they'd be back in Jerusalem within a couple of years. God warns about them, doesn't he, there in verse 8.

[4 : 48] Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have. They wanted them to have these encouraging words, but they weren't true.

And one of those was this man called Hananiah. He's spoken about there in chapter 28. And you can just see the sort of thing he was saying, which was false. Verse 2, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel says, I'll break the yoke of the king of Babylon.

Within two years, I'll bring back to this place all the articles of the Lord's house, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon removed from here and took to Babylon. So two years, it's all going to be over. It's just going to be a storm and a teacup. Things are going to be great again, and all will be well. But that wasn't true. And so, of course, these believers were confused. What's happening? What is going to happen? What should we do? And of course, they were discouraged. Naturally, they'd been taken away from the land that God had promised them and promised their forefathers hundreds of years before, and that God had miraculously brought them into hundreds of years before to enjoy.

And now, they'd left that land. Well, where was God? They were discouraged. What was God doing? Why is this happening to us? If God is for us, if God cares about us, why has he seemingly deserted us?

I'm sure that we can appreciate some of those feelings ourselves. When we look back at the last years, as we look back over our lives, we look back and see circumstance, situations, we can say, we can be confused. Why did this happen to me? Where is God? Perhaps even today, in our present circumstances, we feel that same way. Where are you, Lord? Why have you brought me to this place? Why has this happened? Why am I going through this difficulty? And so, Jeremiah's letter is to bring clarity, understanding, and to give encouragement. First of all, it gives clarity, because he reminds the people and tells the people, look, these false prophets are wrong in saying that God would overthrow Babylon and return you in two years. God wasn't going to do that for 70 more years yet, as he said there later on in the letter. Verse 10, this is what the Lord says, when 70 years are completed in Babylon, I'll come to you and fulfill my gracious promise. That's what he'd promised before. Chapter 25, God had promised and said to the people, verse 12, when the 70 years are fulfilled, I'll punish the king of Babylon and his nation. So therefore, God says to them, settle down.

[7 : 26] You're going to be here for a while. Build houses, plant gardens, get married, get on with life for the time being. They were confused. What should we do? Live, basically. God says live. Get on with doing the things that you've already been doing. Get on with life as normal. Then also, they were discouraged. Where is God? Why has he let us down? Why has he abandoned us, in one sense, into the hands of this wicked people, the Babylonians? And they were wicked. They were awful. They were cruel.

But God hadn't abandoned them, and it wasn't the Babylonians who'd taken them captive, per se. Rather, look at what God says. Verse 4, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile. Later on, in verse 7 as well, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I've carried you into exile. It wasn't that God had abandoned them, or given up on them, or forgotten them, or neglected them, but rather it was part of his care for them. That was hard for them to see. It was part of his disciplining of them. If you know something of what had happened, God's people had drifted away from God. They'd drifted to worship false gods. They'd drifted into practices which were not pleasing to God. They had lost fellowship and relationship with God. And this was God's way of bringing them back to himself. In fact, that's what he promises will happen after the 70 years. Verse 12, then you will call upon me and come unto me, and I will listen to you. You'll seek me and find me. I'll be found by you, declares the Lord. I want to bring you back to myself. I want to bring you back into that right relationship with me. And this is part of my plan and purpose.

It's not that you've been abandoned. Rather, this part of my care and love for you, that you might be right with me. So that promise is given. The promise is there. I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord. But that promise given to God's people over two and a half thousand years ago is a truth which is applicable to us today. Because every promise that we have in the Bible has its fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 1, no matter how many

promises God has made, they are yes in Christ. That's why the Bible is relevant to us today in every situation and has always been relevant and always will be relevant because God is the same God. He does not change. We are the same people. We don't change. We're still sinners who he's brought into a living relationship with himself. And so I want us to think about this promise. We've thought about what it means and what it meant to the people then. But I want us to think about what it means for us. It means that God has a plan for all his people. And that's something which we need to take hold of. To every Christian and to every church, God has a plan. And that's something that's been testified to throughout every generation. It's not just true there. It was true to all God's people.

That he is in control of the events of his church. He is in control of the events of his people. And in the individual lives as well. We think of Job, a man who knew such great suffering and sadness. What does Job say? I know that you, Lord, can do all things. No plan of yours can be thwarted. That's at the end of all that he went through. It's good to have hindsight, isn't it?

[11:04] Psalm 139, where the psalmist says, All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. He knew that his life was not chaotic. He knew that his life was not without purpose, but that God knew about it from beforehand. Proverbs 20, verse 24, a person's steps are directed by the Lord.

Again and again, and we could turn all the way through the Bible again and again. God brings to us these words of comfort, these promises and assurances. Because really, the only place of peace in the midst of what we perceive as the chaos and the mayhem of life is found in knowing that though we are not in control of everything, there is one who is and whose love for us is great.

See, we might feel at times as we go through life, we're walking through a minefield. At any moment, something's going to blow up underneath our feet. Something's going to happen that's going to knock us to our knees.

We're afraid that we're going to have life blow up in our faces. But here we're told again that God has the map of the minefield. He knows the route that we take.

And rather, he is the one who directs our steps. I want later this evening, hopefully you'll be able to come along for us to think about what it is that God has planned for the future. What it is that he has got ahead of us.

[12:27] What we can look forward to. It's in the second half of verse 11 to give you a bit of a taster. This morning, I want to consider what this means to us generally. What does it mean when God says, I know the plans I have for you?

What does this promise mean to build us up, encourage us, when we have such a wonderful Heavenly Father? It means this, that God has a plan for us even if we don't know it.

I know the plans I have for you. It doesn't mean that we know the plans. The D-Day landings of those Allied forces over 70 years ago now, on the 6th of June 1944, was the culmination of months and years of planning, of military leadership, Britain and America getting together, scheming. There was all sorts of special missions carried out, reconnaissance. There was even a dummy message sent when a body, a man's body with secret files was sort of left in the Mediterranean Sea for the Germans to find, saying that we were going to invade another part of the country.

All sorts of things went on. But for the everyday soldier, the ordinary soldier, he knew none of that. He knew none of what the planning, he knew none of what was going to happen. He didn't even have a say in it at all, until the day came, when he was told that tomorrow he was going into battle.

[13:44] That's all he needed to know. And you and I, dear friends, if we are Christians, we have enrolled in the service of our King Jesus. We are under his command.

We are under his authority. We are the ones who are to go where he sends us and to do the things that he calls us to do. One of the essential elements of being a Christian is that submission to and acknowledgement that Jesus is Lord of my life.

It's one of the things that we struggle with most of all because we like to think, as the rest of the world thinks, that we're in control of our destiny. That we're in control of our lives. That we are the ones who are in charge.

That in one sense, actually, life revolves around me. And what I want. And what I like. And my feelings. What the Christian learns and realizes is this, that the world does not revolve around me. And in fact, the place where we can have the greatest enjoyment of life, the place where we can have the greatest security and contentment in life, is found in submitting and giving our lives over to the Lord Jesus Christ.

[14 : 46] And saying, Lord, I want you to be God of my life. I want my life to revolve around you because I know what you want for me is much better than what I want for me. We only have to look around about us, don't we?

To see the reality of that. Of people living their lives to please themselves and finding themselves in all sorts of messes. And we've done it. We've all been there.

And we keep doing it from time to time, even now. Taking back. Well, I think, actually, I know better than you, God, in this situation about my work or about my move or about my relationships or about anything else.

And we take it back and then we try to sort it out and do it ourselves and it all goes pear shape. You see, the wonderful thing is this, that the Lord Jesus Christ, the one who says, I know the plans for you, the plans I have for you, is one who's not a knee-jerk reaction guard.

We are. We respond to a situation because we only see the immediate situation and we respond in a knee-jerk way. But God isn't like that. His directions are not haphazard.

[15 : 51] His plans are not bungled together. He's not surprised by circumstances that overtake us because He knows the plans He has for us.

Paul, in writing to the Christians at Ephesus, reminds them of this wonderful truth. God made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Christ to be put into effect when the times have reached their fulfillment.

He goes on to say, speaking of God, who according to the plan of Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will. Paul's confidence and assurance was this, that everything that was going on was what's happening because God had planned, purposed it, and it was His good pleasure that these things should happen.

I want to ask you, do you have the next 10 years of your life mapped out? You may be one of those super people who is able to sort of plan ahead, but you know very well, all of us know very well, the plans we had when we were younger, the dreams we had when we were in our youth, the dreams about who we would marry, about where we would live, about the career we would take.

Let's be honest, hardly any of those things ever happened, did they? None of those dreams came to fulfillment. None of those plans ever came to enrich. We end up marrying somebody wonderful, but not the person perhaps that we thought they would be.

[17 : 17] We ended up living somewhere great, but not perhaps just where we'd hoped we'd end up. We ended up with a job or career or the family or whatever, but it was never just as we planned it, never just as we'd hoped it would be, never just as we wanted it to be.

It happened not at our time, not in our way. Yet here we are. How have we got to be this place? How have we got to be here in Whitby on the 12th of July?

2015. How have we got to be here? Well, we've got to be here because God has been following His plan for us without us realizing it. I know the plans I have for you. He knew and knows what we don't know, but more than that, He's been following His plan in our lives without us realizing it.

God has been unfolding His plan in your life and mine day by day up until now. None of us are here by accident. None of us are here simply because, well, we've chosen to be here.

None of us are just simply here because that's been under the matter of fate or chance or luck. You and I are here this very morning because God has brought us here to this place this morning at this time.

[18 : 28] From your conception, God has been carrying out His purposes and drawing up and bringing about those things that He chose for you.

Here's what David, the psalmist, had to say about it. You created my inmost being. You knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I'm fearfully and wonderfully made.

Your works are wonderful. I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in that secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.

Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. How precious to me are your thoughts, O God's.

Even if your parents never planned to have you, God did. Even if you've been told that you were a mistake, you aren't. Even if you felt that your life has no real purpose and that you're just bumping along the bottom, let me say to you that it has purpose and it has meaning.

[19 : 39] That the reason that you exist is not simply to fill up a space or to do a job or to be somebody's partner or to be a mother, father, grandparent or child.

The truth is that God has been working so as to bring you to himself. For the reason that every single person has been born in this world is that they might ultimately know God who created them. That they might come to enjoy fellowship with him and life with him now and for eternity. The reason that you're here this morning, dear friends, is not to listen to me waffle on, but the reason he's here that you might meet with God and that he might assure you again that you are the reason that he sent his son into the world.

That you are the reason that he created this world. You are the reason why he has purposed and loved to save you and to make you his own. You are the reason that God is here.

And let me urge you, let me urge you more than ever before, dear friends, if you've never considered that truth, if you've never considered yourself of such value, then see yourself as God sees you.

[20 : 46] Yes, you fail. Yes, you muck it up. Yes, you're a sinner. Yes, you don't deserve his love. Like me, you don't deserve heaven. But God's plan was and is to bring you to know the knowledge of the truth and to act upon that truth and knowledge with faith.

To take God at his promises and his word. To believe on his son, the Lord Jesus, and to hold your sins forgiven and to know what you really are.

A person made in the image of God. To live for him and enjoy him. That means something else, doesn't it?

If God says, I know the plans I have for you and he's been working out those plans in your life and mine to bring us to that point of knowing him and then those of us who are Christians to continue to know him and to follow him, it means that whatever happens to us is part of God's plan for us. Now that's really hard. Whatever has happened to us is part of God's plan for us. You see these folk in exile in Judah, yes they were there because of their sin and they got it wrong and God was dealing with them but it was part of his plan for them.

[21 : 59] The fact they were taken from their home, the fact they were bereft from family at times, the fact that they were in a place which was strange, the fact that they were prisoners in one sense was all very hard for them but it was God's plan for them.

Whatever happens, dear friends, in the coming months, in the coming years is not down to fate or chance or luck. We are not masters of our own future. God is at work.

That's a hard thing though, isn't it? That whatever happens to us is part of God's plan for us. We find that hard. I'm not saying it's easy. It's not easy to comprehend. It's not easy. Especially when, of course, we experience trouble, when we experience pain, when we experience hardship.

It wasn't easy for these folk who are confused and discouraged. And we're confused and discouraged when those things occur to us. We're confused because we know that the Bible tells us that God is good.

We know that the Bible tells us that he loves us. We know that his desire is to do us good and yet here we are experiencing pain and suffering and sorrow and grief. We're confused.

[23 : 07] It just doesn't add up. It doesn't seem reasonable in our minds. And again, we're discouraged like the people were there, discouraged because the trouble we're experiencing makes us feel that God is far from us.

It makes us feel as if God has given up on us. But the answer again to that confusion and discouragement is here in this letter. I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord.

Why are we confused? Well, we sang that hymn, didn't we, just before we came to this message. By faith. Ultimately, the Christian life is a life that's lived by faith.

When we move away from faith, then immediately we find ourselves in problems. Faith isn't blind. It isn't stupid. It isn't ignorant. It's faith in the person of God as he's revealed himself in Jesus Christ. Faith in the very works of God that we see in the world around about us and we've experienced in our lives already. But when we look at a situation and circumstance which is difficult and painful, then immediately we move from faith to sight, if I can put it that way.

[24 : 15] And we look and say, well, this has happened to me, that's happened to me, this has gone wrong, this has gone wrong, I've suffered in this way, therefore, I'm not going to trust God. Faith says, ultimately, this has happened to me, that has happened to me, but I know whom I've believed.

I don't know why God's wondrous grace. I don't know whether days of good will come. I don't know whether days of sorrow will come, but I know who I've believed. And that's what makes the

difference between knowing about God and even the relationship with God.

Knowing about God says, I know these things are true, but then when this happens, it seems to counteract what I know is true. Faith says, I know him and I know that he never changes.

I know that he's always the same. I know that whatever happens to me, he cannot change from being that loving heavenly father he is. Therefore, whatever is happening here does not contradict his love.

It doesn't contradict his word. In my mind, it might do, but not in God's and not in reality. We judge things with the wisdom of men rather than what we know about the truth of God.

[25 : 22] So the Bible is full of, this is why it's so important that we read the Bible, it's so important that we know the Bible because here we have one experience of it, full of people who experience the trials, troubles, hardships of life, but it was all for their goods.

Take Moses, we've looked at Moses in Exodus, there he is, just a baby, thrown into the Nile in a little wicker basket, he could have eaten by crocodiles or killed or whatever. Why was he put in that situation?

So that he could be raised in the palace of the Pharaoh. Pharaoh. And then when he's 40, he has to flee for his life because the Pharaoh wants to kill him and he has to go and be a goat herder in the desert, the back end of beyond for 40 years.

Why did that happen? Because God was preparing him to lead his people of two million through the wilderness for 40 years. And then there was Joseph, of course, wasn't there?

His brothers were so jealous of him, they threw him down into a pit. Some of them wanted to kill him, but because they were greedy, they decided to sell him as a slave. He's taken as a slave to a foreign land where he doesn't speak the language, away from his parents.

[26 : 26] He's only a teenager. He's accused of all sorts of things. He's thrown into prison for several years so that he could become the prime minister of that land and save not only that nation but his own family from famine.

Think about Ruth, a childless widow in her youth, taken again from her land so she could become the great grandmother of the greatest king of Israel, David.

And we can go on and we can go on and we can go on and we can go on. We're confused because we don't walk by faith, we walk by sight and we walk by feelings and feelings are real and sight is real but God in whom we put our faith is more real.

And likewise, we're discouraged. We're often discouraged because we forget the promises of God. That's why the Bible is there because it's full of the promises of God again and again and again and again.

I will never leave you nor forsake you. Promises that assure us that God is always at work for our good, always at work for his glory, always at work to bring about in every circumstance those things which are right.

[27 : 41] We know Romans 8, 28. It's one of the key verses of the Bible and we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him who've been called according to his purpose but it's not the only verse.

There's more and more and more and more that tell us the same thing. Here's Hebrews 12. God is treating you as sons for what son is not disciplined by his father therefore endure hardship as discipline.

James chapter 1. Consider it pure joy my brothers whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.

Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete not lacking in anything. 1 Peter chapter 1 verses 6 and 7. In this you greatly rejoice though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

These have come so that your faith of greater worth than gold which perishes even though refined by fire may be proved genuine and result in praise at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[28 : 48] I know the plans I have for you says the Lord but think about those plans tonight but let us even now move away from sight move away from those things that let us down let us move again to faith faith for this church in the next years faith for ourselves as individuals faith for those members of our family that we love and care for faith in God who has plan that cannot fail and that is is cannot cease to be good for us.

