

Living in a Strange Land

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[0 : 00] Turn back with me this evening to Jeremiah chapter 29. I want to consider with you this letter that Jeremiah wrote, and we'll find the text in verse 10.

For thus says the Lord, when 70 years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you. And I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. 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.

Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me. When you seek me with all your heart, I will be found by you, declares the Lord.

And I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the Lord. And I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

If you're a Christian tonight, I wonder if there are times or there have been times in your life when you've been tempted to rebel against the life that God has given you.

[1 : 30] You may say to the Lord, I didn't choose this life. It's full of elements that I don't understand and I feel I can't cope with.

I see other people who have a very different life from mine, and they seem to be getting on really well. Why should I have to live this life, the life full of restriction, a life perhaps full of pain, a life in which I don't have much choice, and a life that just doesn't really yield much pleasure at all as far as this world is concerned.

And the temptation can be to try and rebel against your life and to create a utopia for yourself.

Well, I want tonight for you to come back with me, please, back in time just like we did this morning, but this time even further back. Another 600 years from Jesus' time in the world.

600 B, round about 600 BC to a time in Jerusalem, same as we were this morning, we were in Jerusalem this morning, but this is a very different Jerusalem.

[2 : 47] This is a Jerusalem that is full of uncertainty and in which the people, the inhabitants are looking at a future which is destructive, in which they see their families are being separated.

An enemy has come and has taken away the very best of their produce and their people. They don't know what's going to happen from one day to the next.

There's a sense of foreboding in the air. And what's more that there's a prophet who is predicting that Jerusalem is going to be utterly destroyed.

And if you come back with me into the minds of those who had been taken away by the enemy, the Babylonians, and try to understand what they must have felt as they were taken against their will into a country whose language they didn't understand, having been brought up in a very defined culture and in happy homes, most of them, I guess, for them to be all of a sudden taken away against their will hundreds of miles into Babylon and for them to be told, this is now your home forever.

You will not get back. You will never get back. You're going to have to make your home here in Babylon. You're going to have to become a Babylonian.

[4 : 16] You're going to have to work for us. You're going to have to be part of our society, whether you like it or not. But miserable as that must have been, it must have been their worst nightmare, as it would be for any of us.

There was an even further problem, a greater problem, and that was this. Because the Jews, the Israelites, Judeans, whatever you want to call them, they were God's people.

They traced their history and their uniqueness all the way back hundreds of years to when God had met Abraham and when he had made a promise to Abraham that from now on he was going to be their God and they were going to be his people.

So God was tied to Israel. He was bound to them by way of a promise, a promise which he said he would never break.

But now they were being taken away from the land that he promised, God promised to them, from the city that was his capital, from the temple which God had chosen to reveal himself to the people of Israel, now they were being taken away as captives into a country that they had never been to before and as far as they knew they would never leave because they were going to be taken there for good, permanently.

[5 : 43] So I think that we can appreciate something of the unpleasantness to say the least, the despair, the awfulness of the reality of waking up in a country and the languages and the smells and the environment are all so strange to them.

There's a country in which there's all kinds of religion, in which there's a different way of thinking from the way in which they thought.

I should of course add to this, as most of you will know, that the reason this was happening was because their forefathers had been so rebellious against God for hundreds of years.

They had turned their back away from worshipping God and they had chosen to worship other gods because it suited them and it gave them the pleasure that they wanted. Other gods weren't threatening.

Other gods didn't demand the kind of lifestyle that the living and the true God demanded. It was much easier to worship something that you saw and something that couldn't speak to you than with worship the living and true God who led you and guided you and commanded you as to how to live your day-by-day life.

[6 : 57] You know, there's something in us that doesn't want that. That's the reason why many people choose not to be converted because they don't want God to intrude and to interfere into their lives.

My life is mine and I want to live it my way. That's what the Israelites said. Refusing to listen to God. Refusing to obey Him.

And now as a consequence of their own idolatry, God was fulfilling His warning to them that He warned for hundreds of years through the prophets that the day would come when the Babylonians would come and that's what was happening.

The reality all of a sudden dawned upon them when they were on their way. They were on their way to Babylon. Jerusalem was being systematically taken apart.

And there were notable people who were taken away at that time. People who we have come to be familiar with in the Bible. People like Daniel and Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

[8 : 00] These were men who were faithful to the Lord, who loved God and who served Him. And they became examples of how to serve God in a foreign country.

So the questions that must have confronted these people, they must have been many.

Should we just obey the leader, the government of Babylon? Should we learn the language? Should we listen to certain prophets?

Because there were some prophets at that time who were telling these people, look, two years and you'll get back to Jerusalem. But these were false prophets.

Jeremiah told them, don't listen to them. Well, should they listen to them? It's always easier to listen to something that we want to hear rather than something that we don't want to hear, isn't it?

[9 : 02] So they were faced with the choice of listening to God's voice through the reliability of Jeremiah or listening to what was more pleasant and pleasing to them.

That was the false prophets. Well, what were they going to do? Or were they going to rebel? Were they going to join a resistance movement and try to escape and make their way back to Jerusalem? How were they going to live in a country that was so strange and foreign to them?

They had no idea until God in His mercy, He sent them through the prophet a letter.

You see, the prophets in the Old Testament are not just warnings. Interwoven with the warnings that God gives His people are a message of hope and a future.

And here is God, He's sending this letter to the exiles. Those who have already been taken captive and those who are trying to get their heads around their new environment. Trying to ask, how shall we then live?

[10 : 10] And God is saying, here is how you should live. And I want to put something to you. I don't know if this is, I think it's possible. I'm not, I can't be certain of this.

But I wonder if this letter was read by Daniel and Shadrach and Meshach and Abednego. And if this letter was their inspiration to stand for the Lord.

To become involved in the country of Babylon with its government. You know, of course, the story of how Daniel got to be the prime minister eventually of Babylon. And how he was prepared to be involved in his government.

But also, when the challenge came for him to have to stand for the Lord. He was prepared to take that challenge and to do what was necessary.

I wonder if this was his inspiration. I really can't be sure. But it's very possible that it was.

[11 : 11] What's all this got to do with us tonight? Well, I'll tell you. Because this time in the history of Israel. It became representative of how God's people were scattered throughout the whole world.

It became a kind of symbol of how New Testament Christians were going to live. For example, when the Apostle Peter writes his first letter.

He addresses his fellow Christians as strangers scattered throughout the world by the foreknowledge of God. And so, the captivity here.

Way back 600 years BC. Has become a kind of a symbol. Something to represent. Living as a people.

Living as a people. The people of God. In a strange world. In a world that is hostile and indifferent. In a world that perhaps shows very little sympathy for the Christian faith.

[12 : 18] And that's the way I'd like us to look at this chapter and this letter this evening. A letter that was sent to God's people. Living in a strange land.

And here's what God has to say to them first of all. He says in verse 4. Thus says the Lord. Build houses and live in them.

Plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters. Take wives for your sons. And give your daughters in marriage. That they may bear sons and daughters. Multiply there and do not decrease.

That's the first thing he says. How can we sum this up? Well I guess in the words settle down. Settle where you are. Don't listen to anyone who's giving you false hope.

That somehow in a few months that you'll get back to Jerusalem. You won't. If you had listened to me in the first place. Then you would know. But my promise is that it's going to take 70 years for all this to change.

[13 : 16] And by the way that's exactly what happened. The captivity lasted 70 years. Exactly as God had promised. When Cyrus came to the throne. He issued a decree that the Jews were free to go back when they wanted.

But it was going to take 70 years. Meanwhile God's people had to settle where they were. And be faithful to him. But it meant them. It meant them becoming accustomed to their new environment.

Whether or not they chose. None of them chose it. And this is where my first question comes in. They had to understand. That it was not by some kind of random chance.

That they would be taken away. It was by the plan. And the foreknowledge. And the ordination of God. God was ruling. He was reigning over everything.

Even although it didn't look like it. Many of these people like I said. Would have asked. Why are we being taken away from. The land which God gave us. And gave our forefathers.

[14 : 17] It was his promise. And now they were being taken away. Was this God breaking his promise? No it wasn't. God was ultimately in control. But they first of all.

Had to understand that their circumstances. Was the doing of God. The life that they were living. Was the life that God was giving them.

In his providence. They would have said. I didn't choose this. This. I'm not happy with this. I'm in a country. That I didn't want to be in.

I want to be home. With my parents. And my grandparents. Daniel I guess. Must have said that. He must have thought that. A young man. Imagine being taken away.

From the places. Where he loved. And knew. He would have grown up. Perhaps he had an allotment. A beautiful piece of land. That his father was one day. Going to give him. Perhaps he would sit down.

[15 : 11] In the night time. And look after his sheep. And just dream of the future. Perhaps he had his eye. On a girl. That he hoped to marry one day. Just like any young person.

Dreams of the future. And then the whole thing. Is taken out of his hands. He's taken away in chains. And he's put. In a place. As the last place.

He wants to be. And yet. And yet. The first thing. He has to. Reconcile himself with. Is. That this. Is God's.

Doing. This didn't happen. By chance. This is God's. Doing. And I guess. It was very difficult.

For Daniel. To come to that conclusion. Just as it would have been. Difficult for Joseph. To come to that conclusion. His own brothers. Having betrayed him. Into the hands of the Midianites.

[16 : 05] And them having taken him. All the way down to Egypt. Here's another one. Who wakes up. And he's the servant of Potiphar. In a strange land. And yet. He came to the point.

In his life. Where he had discovered. That this. Was God's. Planning. And ordering. And guidance. All along. God was in it.

Leading him. And guiding. Every event. You meant it. For evil. He said to his brothers. At the end. But God. Meant it. For good. And here we have God.

Saying to his people. In Babylon. Settle down. This is my doing. My doing. And I want to ask tonight.

And I say this. With. With hesitation. What is. This passage. Saying to us. We live in a world.

[17 : 00] Where choice. Is the all important factor. Isn't it. And where. There are people. In this world. Who are able to choose. Their own future. And perhaps.

We look. Enviously. At some people. And it seems. That everything. Is going well. With them. They've got plenty. Money. They've got success. Everything. Is going well. With them.

And the very opposite. Is happening to us. We're in a place. Where we don't like. We didn't choose. That is giving us. More and more. And more.

Hardship. All the time. And then. We're expected. To believe. That we're expected. Just to. To surrender. To that place. Well.

Whatever you do tonight. Can I say this? Put God first. And do the right thing. Whatever choices. We make.

[17 : 52] Tonight. In this life. Make sure. That these. Are the guidance. That God guides us. Into these choices. And make sure. That we don't put ourselves.

Before God. We need to make sure. That we. That we. We can never understand. The providence of God.

When we talk about. God's providence. We're talking about. The mysterious way. In which. He brings together. The events. And the history. Of each one of us. And he. And he has.

He has. Four ordained. That's what. The catechism tells us. He has four ordained. Whatsoever comes to pass. And that can be.

A hugely. Difficult. Teaching to accept. A fact to accept. And yet. Tonight. We must put God first. Christ. And we must accept.

[18 : 48] That where we are. Is where God wants us to be. That's the starting point. And we're not to create. Our own life.

For ourselves. We're not to rebel. Against what God has. Led us into. By his providence. We are to stay. Where we are. To be where we are.

And what. Whatever choices. We make. Otherwise. We're to make sure. That they are. The will of God. That God. Is put first. But then.

The next thing. That God. Tells them to do. Is that. They are to. Seek. Verse 7. The welfare. Of the city. Where I have sent you. Into exile. We are to seek.

The welfare. Of the city. Where I have sent you. Into exile. Now you would. Perhaps. Think that. This would be. The opposite. To what. The captive Jews. Would have expected.

[19 : 40] God. To say to them. After all. They were. Not Babylonians. They didn't belong. In Babylon. They were strangers. In a strange place. They had been taken.

Against their will. Babylon was an enemy. You don't. You don't. Contribute. To the welfare. Of your enemy. Do you. You. You fight him. You resist.

You rebel. You do. The opposite. To what he tells you. To do. In order to create. As much civil unrest. As you possibly can. No says God. You do not.

Because you are there. Because I want you there. This is my doing. The enemy has come. Against you. As my servant. You know. God calls.

Nebuchadnezzar. His servant. His servant. It doesn't necessarily mean. That he worshipped. God. At least at that time.

[20 : 35] Anyway. But what it means. Is that God. God had again. In his providence. He had. So ordered things. That Nebuchadnezzar. Would come against. Israel. In his own mind.

Nebuchadnezzar's mind. He was doing this. For himself. But in actual fact. He was under the control. All the time. Of. The sovereignty. Of God. And so the people.

Had to. They had to reconcile. That. That was the case. As well. As they. As they tried to. Become accustomed. To their new life. And they had to. Seek the welfare. Of the city.

Christians. In the New Testament. Live. In a. World. Which is hostile. Jesus said. In this world. You will have trouble. He said. If they hated me. They will hate you.

Also. The history. Of the New Testament. Church. Is littered. With Christians. God's people. Being persecuted. Sometimes. Because of their faith.

[21 : 32] In Jesus. Even this day. There are places. In the world. Where men and women. Are being put to death. Because of their faith. In the Lord. It's not always like that.

In every place. But. We live. In a world. Which is indifferent. To the gospel. And in our own world. We see that. By means of. Atheism. Atheism.

Atheism. Is not just some kind of. Passive. Belief. It's not just. Somebody who says. Well. If you want to believe. In the Christian faith. Then so be it. But I choose not to.

No. No. Atheism. Is a rampant force. Which has no sympathy. And no tolerance. For the Christian faith. And all you have to do.

If you're online. Is read the comments. That are made. In likes of the Scotsman. Every time. That there is an article. In which.

[22 : 29] Which makes reference. To. A Christian church. Some of them. Are utterly. Horrific. We so-called live.

In a. A tolerant. Society. But we don't. We don't. We are to live. And we are to seek.

The welfare. We're not just to. Suffer. Our circumstances. And neither. Are we to withdraw. Into. Monasteries. We are to.

Seek. The welfare. Of the world. Around us. And the country. Around us. And the government. Around us. And that means. That we live. As responsible.

Obedient. Citizens. The apostle Paul. Tells us. That the powers that be. That the authorities. Which govern. And that was even in his day. Where there were outrightly.

[23 : 25] Pagan authorities. The Romans. Were in charge. With all the atrocity. And the. The anti-Christian. Sentiment. That there was. In those days.

And yet. Even Paul says. These authorities. Are placed there. By God. God has given them. The authority. And so. Therefore you don't rebel. Against them. You don't.

Some kind of. Mount some kind of. Resistance. Or civil unrest. You obey. And you seek. The welfare. Of the country. To which you belong.

Whether it's a city. Whether it's a country. Whether it's a town. And that means. That as responsible. Citizens. As Christian people. In the Isle of Lewis. That we must. Seek the welfare.

Of the environment. Around us. To keep. The bylaws. And to honor those. To whom honor. Is due. Whether you agree. With them or not. Whether you like.

[24 : 21] Them or not. It means that. Also. That where you have. The opportunity. To stand. For the council. Or whether you have. Opportunity to stand. For parliament.

Then by all means. To seek. Every possible. Recourse. To improve. The world. The earth is the Lord. Says the Bible.

And the fullness. Thereof. It's God's world. We are not. To withdraw. Into our own world. We are not. To be a world. Within a world. We are to have. An involvement.

In this world. For its good. Now of course. There are two. Exceptions. To that. One is when. An authority. Tells you. To do something. That God's word. Forbids you to do.

And the other one. Is the opposite. When an authority. He stops you. From doing something. That God's word. Commands you to do. At that point. You have to say.

[25 : 16] With all due respect. With all due respect. I have to decline. That's what Daniel did. And God blessed it. In a way that even he.

I guess. Never imagined. Now we also live. In a democratic world. I don't suppose. That Babylon was very democratic. In fact it wasn't. But we live in a democratic world.

A world where. We have a voice. And we're thankful for that. We're thankful for. The principle. Of free speech. In our world. And we use it.

We make use of it. Respectfully. And politely. We don't ever want. Because whatever we do. As Christians. It reflects. The Lord Jesus Christ.

And so when people see us. Behaving. In a. In a. Mischievous way. Or in a rude way. Then it all reflects. Back on. Jesus. And the gospel.

[26 : 10] And the Christian church. And so whatever we do. We choose our words. Carefully. We choose our ways. To make our point. Even when it comes to something. Which is. So outrageous. A same-sex marriage.

We have to be polite. And we have to be. Firm. But we have to be. We have to be. Respectful. And we have to say. With all due respect. This is our position.

These are our arguments. We believe. That our arguments. Are sound. And logical. We would like you. To listen to these. And please take them. Into account. Because we want. Not to cause trouble.

But we want. You to listen. To listen to what. The voice of reason. Has to say. We are to seek. The welfare. Actively.

Positively. With all the gifts. That God has given us. To do. The Bible never. Allows anyone. To avoid their taxes. Or to fill in their tax return.

[27 : 07] Wrong. Or to use deceit. Or to use cheating. In order to. Improve my own life. Avoid. The.

We are to seek. The welfare of the city. And the Lord says. We are to pray. In verse 7. We are to pray. To the Lord. On his behalf. For his welfare. And you will find. Your welfare.

How much do we pray. For our. Those. Who are over us. In government. Whether they be. Local government. I confess. That. Some. Let me tell you. What I confess. This evening. Sometimes. I come to prayer.

And I pray. Well. Will I pray. For Alex Salmond. And the government. Or David Cameron. And the UK government. And I'm. The voice comes to me. There's no point. It's too big.

Things have gone too far. What a shameful thing. For me to confess. That's absolutely.

[28 : 07] Deplorable. And when that voice. Comes into your head. Don't listen to it. For a moment. Because we are to pray. For big things.

Tonight. We are to pray. For radical change. For God. To move. In a way. That perhaps.

He hasn't. For hundreds of years. We are to pray. For. A spectacular. Exhibition. Of the power of God. In our land.

Amongst ordinary people. And amongst government. We are to pray. That God will so move. Throughout. Our towns. And our villages. That we will not be able.

To cope. With the result. Who knows. What God. Will do. If we pray. Do you pray. In faith. For. Those. Who lead us.

[29 : 05] Those who govern over us. And those who are. Our fellow citizens. Men and women. Our communities. Do we pray. That God will. Create. Within our society.

A sense of. A sense of. That kind of conviction. And. Emptiness. Which will lead people. Eventually. To the gospel. And have we lost sight.

Of the power. Of the gospel. In a country. Like ours. You heard me. Praying earlier on. For countries. In the world. Where. Where the gospel. Has taken hold. Like South America.

I've seen it for myself. Where there are. Huge churches. Men and women. Have come to faith. In Jesus. And it's made an impact. On society.

And then we turn. To our own country. And say. Well God. Has finished with us. How do you know that? How do you know. That God has finished with us? Simply because. Things are the way. They are now.

[30 : 05] You are not. In any position. And neither am I. To believe. That God has. Finished with us. We are to pray. We are to pray. Earnestly. To a God.

Who is able. To move. Mountains. So tonight. We pray. And we respect. And we honor. Those. We pray for them.

And we ask. That God will move. In a great way. In ways. Which we never. Expected. Moving on. Because there's. The time is going. This letter.

This amazing letter. It gives command. To all those. Who were taken. Into exile. But it also. Gives this. This great promise. That I know. That so many Christians.

Have. Have on their wall. And they have written. In their diary. And they. It's a promise. Which. Which is so precious. To the Lord's people. Everywhere. Here it is. Verse 11. I know the plans.

[31 : 00] I have for you. Declares the Lord. Plans for wholeness. And not for evil. To give you a future. And a hope. I'm not suggesting.

For a moment. That. That. This promise. Doesn't apply. Individually. In your life. In my life. Because God. Does know the plans.

That he has for us. Plans for wholeness. And not for evil. But whenever you come. To the Bible. It's always. Just a little bit. Unwise. To just take a verse. Out of the Bible.

And just. And just write it. Without knowing. What is the background. Well I've told you. Some of the background. And I think it's important. For us to try and. Try and. Consider together.

What it would have meant. For those. For one thing. The promise was made. To a people. As opposed to individuals. It was made. To Israel. Together.

[31 : 52] And the promise. Was God. Remembering. His covenant. With them. And that whatever. Was happening to them. At the moment. God was going. To fulfill his promise.

Which resulted. Of course. In the fullness of time. In the coming of Jesus. And here is God. Saying to them. I have not. Forgotten. To be gracious. To you. I know.

What you're going through. At this moment. In time. I know the darkness. And the despair. And the hopelessness. But believe me. Trust me. I have a future.

For. You might not see it. But I have a future. For you. As my people. And that future. Is a glorious one. Because I'm going to send.

My son. Into the world. Who will be born. In Bethlehem. And he will die. On the cross. And rise again. And come. Into heaven. To sit at my right hand. By his death.

[32 : 48] Your sins. And your iniquities. I will remember. No more. You will be cleansed. And washed. And forgiven. Through the death. Of. My son. On the cross.

That was the plan. Meanwhile. They had to suffer. This captivity. In order. For God. To bring about. This plan. Into fruition. It had to happen.

That way. You can't see it. At the time. Because your vision. Is so limited. No wonder. They were only. Frail human beings. Like every one of us.

And they were interpreting. Their circumstances. Negatively. In much the same way. As we would tend. To do something similar. We would tend. To conclude. We'd look at our circumstances.

And we make conclusions. God has forgotten me. I've never been a Christian. In the first place. This means. That God has turned his back. On me. Why? Because I'm going through. Something that's horrendous.

[33 : 46] Something I didn't expect. I'm in terms. But we must never try. And interpret. Our lives. Or the things. That happen to us. In life. In terms of.

How we understand them. That's why we sang together. That great psalm. In Psalm 77. In which the psalmist. Pours his heart out to God. Because he's going through something.

We don't know what it was. But we know that he was going through. A crisis. In which. His confidence in God. Was shaken to the very core. And in which. He was brought to ask.

Will the Lord reject me forever? Verse 7. Will he never show his grace? Has he withdrawn. His steadfast love. And turned from me his face? Has your promise failed.

For all time? Is God no longer kind? Has he in his great wrath. Dismissed compassion from his mind? What's the answer? That was how the psalmist.

[34 : 43] Was interpreting his life. At that particular time. That's how he saw things. Until. He was brought back. To remember.

What God had done for them. In the past. Then. In verse 10. Then. Then. To my heart. There came this thought. On this. I will rely. The years. Of the right hand.

Of power. Of him. Who is most high. I will recall. The Lord's great deeds. Your works. Of long ago. I'll meditate. On all your acts. Your mighty deeds. I'll show.

So the next time. That you're tempted. To think. That the Lord. Has turned his back on you. Do you know what you'll do? You'll. You'll come back. To the one place. In which God. Himself. Displays.

His extraordinary. Undying. Unending. Love. Which is. The death. Of Jesus. At Calvary. And you'll say. With the apostle Paul. He who did not.

[35 : 37] Spare his own son. But gave him up. For us all. How shall he not. Also. Freely. With him. Give us. All things. That's.

What we lay hold. Upon. Tonight. That's. What our hope. Is. That's. Where. We. Rely. And so.

The Lord is. Is. Promising. His plans. For his. People. In which. Somehow. Their suffering. We're going to be.

We're going to be. Included. And woven. Into. The master plan. Of God. Which is. For his glory. And that's.

The second thing. I want us to think about. When we read this verse. And I would like us. To remember that. When the Bible. Tells us. That God has a plan. For you. It's not about us.

[36 : 35] It's about him. And that means that. Things. May not go. The way. That we. Expect. You know.

When. And again. I went. I used to go through this. Myself. When I was a student. When I was a young Christian. We would discuss. The whole issue. Of the. God's plan. For our lives. And we would wonder.

What that plan. Was going to be. Where am I going to live. Where is going to God. Going to lead me. Eventually. What kind of job. Am I going to have. What kind of person.

Am I going to marry. If anyone at all. What's God's future. For us. And naturally. I guess. There's something. With all of us. That kind of. Is curious. About the future.

Particularly. When. We know. That we have a God. Who has mapped out. The future for us. Do you know. The one thing. I've discovered. As an older.

[37 : 35] Christian now. That God. Is not going to tell you. What these plans are. He's just going to do it. And what you and I.

Need to be. Is submissive. To that will. And to that way. And we need to live. The Christian life. Faithfully. Every day. And as we do so.

And when we go wrong. When we come back. In repentance to God. And we ask him. To restore our soul. And to make us walk. In the paths of righteousness. Then he will. Fulfill.

His plan. For us. Which is a plan. That's not. That doesn't revolve. Around us. And our happiness. It's for his glory. And we need to live.

We need to understand. That he's not there for us. We're there for him. And our greatest. Objective. Tonight. Our greatest. Aim. And ambition. Tonight. Is that God's name.

[38 : 30] May be glorified. Whatever. That. Takes. And sometimes. It doesn't involve. An easy life.

In fact. I think I can say. That there will be times. That will involve. Difficulty. And darkness. And uncertainty.

And things. That you didn't choose. That are unpleasant. To you. And that you feel. That you can't. Get out of. Because that's the way.

In which God. Guarantees. Our wholeness. That's what he says. Plans for wholeness. And not for evil. That does not mean.

An easy. Stress free. Life. You could read that. Very wrongly. And you could interpret it.

[39 : 30] To mean. That God wants me. To be successful. He wants me. To be whole. He wants me. To be healed. Of every disease. He doesn't want me.

Ever to be depressed. He doesn't want me. Ever to be down. He doesn't want me. Ever to be unhappy. And when I am. It's because I'm. Doing something wrong. And I need to rediscover.

How not to be. How not to be unhappy. Well that's the Joel Osteen gospel. That's not the gospel. I find in the Bible. The Bible.

Gives us. The most amazing. Examples. Of men. And women. Of God. Who went. Through. The most horrendous.

Experiences. To give God. The glory. All you do. Is read. Hebrews chapter 11. To rediscover. What it takes. To live the life. Of faith.

[40 : 30] You keep your eye. On Hebrews chapter 11. Read some of the stories. Of men and women. Who have lived in this world. And they have been prepared. To suffer. The most horrendous.

Lives. And the most horrendous. And one of my great heroes. I think I've told you this. Before is Adoniram Judson. Who went to. Who went to Burma. And just at the end. Of the 18th century.

Spent the rest of his life. In Burma. And what that man suffered. For the gospel. Is indescribable. Day after day. Imprisoned. And tortured. And shackled.

In pain. Continuously. Losing. I think it was three wives. He lost. Or at least. He was on his third wife. By the time. By the time. He died himself. And yet.

He was prepared. To do that. Because. His. His. Aim. His objective. In this life. Was the glory of God.

[41 : 26] And the extension. Of God's kingdom. The last part. In this passage. Promises. God's forgiveness. To those who are afar off.

Let's just read it together. I know the time has gone. He says. Then you will call upon me. And come and pray to me. I will hear you. You will seek me. And find me. When you seek me. With all your heart. I will be found by you.

Declares the Lord. And I will restore your fortunes. And gather you. From all the nations. And all the places. Where I have driven you. Declares the Lord. And I will bring you. Back. To the place.

From which I sent you. Into exile. And if this verse doesn't. Present to us.

In closing this evening. The grace. And the kindness of God. You know. If God. Was going to really deal with Israel.

[42 : 21] According to justice. Then he would have written them off. All together. But God. In wrath. Remembers mercy.

And tonight. He remembers mercy. That's what we're here for tonight. We're here to celebrate. The mercy of God. In Jesus Christ. And we're here.

To. Make clear. I hope. The. Coming of Jesus. Into the world. The death. Of the Son of God. The resurrection. The triumphant.

Glorious resurrection. Of Jesus Christ. Which spells. Forgiveness. To those who ask. Whether you've. Strayed as a Christian.

There are many people. Who have strayed. As Christians. Perhaps for years. Perhaps. In a major fashion. And the problem.

[43 : 18] With such a person. Is that they can very easily. Write themselves off. And that they can say. I couldn't have been a Christian. In the first place. Because of the subsequent life. That I have lived.

God cannot have any more time. For me. Because. There was a time. In my life. Which. In which I believed. I'd come to faith. In Jesus. But things went astray. I went astray.

And now there's no hope for me. How do you know that? How do you know that? I don't know which part of the Bible. You get that from. Ah. You say. But what about.

Alexander the coppersmith. Or Demas. Or. Or who was the. Who was the other one? There's several of them. Diotrephes. Who loves to be first. They abandoned the faith.

Where are they now? They're nowhere. How do you know? We don't know what happened to these men. You have no right to conclude. That God has written you off. And let's say for example.

[44 : 15] That. You weren't a Christian. In the first place. It's possible. I don't know your heart. What are you going to do about it? Even if you weren't a Christian. In the first place.

The gospel is for sinners. The gospel is for people. Who aren't Christians. And the invitation is given. To all. Who labor.

And are heavy laden. Who are weary and burdened. And is that not you tonight? A person who. Is conscious of your wrongdoing. And you're straying. Which has only brought.

Emptiness. Into your own life. Is it not time. To rediscover. The amazing mercy of God. That's shown to us.

In Jesus Christ. And if you're not a Christian. The answer is the same. Seek me. He says. Seek me. What does that mean? It means to come to Jesus personally.

[45 : 15] It means to open your Bible. And to accept. That you. Have no hope for yourself. That you cannot save yourself. Just like what we're. Just like we were saying this morning.

That if you're going to be right with God tonight. It has to be God's doing. And for you to turn away. From all your attempts. At your own goodness. And come.

To accept. What Jesus has done for you. On the cross of Calvary. And dying. As your sacrifice. The sacrifice that paid for your sin.

And take it. Accept him. Believe in him. Trust in him. Know him. As your own personal Lord.

And know the change. The transformation. That he can make. To your heart. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven.

[46 : 16] We pray that you will. Once again. Bless your word. To each one of us. We thank you for it. And we pray that you will. You will take it. And. That the seed of God.

Will be planted. The seed of the word. Will be planted. In our. In our hearts. And that we will. Be faithful to you. Lord.

We. Confess. Our own unfaithfulness. Our lack of faith. Our lack of obedience. The way in which. We are so easily distracted. By. Things that are going to come to nothing.

At the end of the day. That we lose sight. Of the glory of your kingdom. We pray to be enthused. By your plan. The plan. The plan that you have for us. In which we are involved.

We ask Lord. That we might. Truly pray. Your kingdom come. And your will be done. On earth. As it is. In heaven. And may we be part. Of that glorious.

[47 : 12] Guaranteed. Kingdom. In Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.