

God's Plans For His People

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Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 00] In our worship, we're singing firstly in Psalm 30, Psalm number 30 in the Scottish Psalter. That's on page 239, and the tune is Ayrshire.

Lord, I will thee extol, for thou hast lifted me on high, and over me thou to rejoice, made'st not mine enemy. O thou who art the Lord my God, I in distress to thee with loud cries lifted up my voice, and thou hast healed me.

Verses 1 to 5 in Psalm 30, we stand. If you're able to stand, please stand for the singing. O thou who art the Lord my God, I in distress to thee.

With thou trisepted up my voice, and thou hast healed me.

O Lord, my soul, thou hast brought up, and rescued from the grave.

[1 : 59] O thou who art the Lord my God, I in distress to thee. O thou who art the Lord my God, I in distress to thee.

O thou hast the Lord my God, I in distress to thee. For ye that have his holy word, sing praise unto the Lord.

And give adieu, if that's when ye his holy hands rejoice.

For but an open glass is rough, like in his pale eyes.

We pray before the night in due, a force of joy arise.

[3 : 31] Let's briefly now engage in prayer. We're praying especially for the young folks for the Sunday School and Cresce and Twinnies. O Lord, our God, we thank you for these great words that you have given us to sing.

Words that remind us and teach us of your holiness and the way in which we can approach you and seek your help at any time. And we thank you especially for the emphasis in these words, that you bring life to your people.

That for all who have come to trust in you, you have raised them up to life, to that eternal life which we have in Jesus Christ. And we thank you, Lord, that we have this instruction in your word to teach our mind and to give us to realize that we cannot look in any hope to the things of this present world.

But that we should look upwards by faith and upwards to your promises of eternal rest in heaven that you have prepared for your people. So bless our young people today, we pray.

Bless them as they return from a time of holiday once again to take up their place in school. And those of them who have gone on in life and study on the mainland, we commit them to you too.

[4 : 44] We ask your blessing for the young ones here today and for all who attend Cresce and Twinnies and Sunday School. Lord, bless them, we pray. Bless the teaching of your word to them.

Bless their teachers. We thank you for their dedication, for their willingness, Lord, to give up their time to look after and to care for and teach our young people. And so for all of these young lives, Lord, we pray today that your blessing will rest upon them.

And that they may know as they grow up from day to day and week by week a steady increase in their understanding and knowledge of the things of God. We pray especially for their salvation and ask, Lord, that they will come to walk in your ways, to have their trust and their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Remember us now, then, we pray. Look upon us in mercy and pardon our sins. For Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. Now, last week I mentioned 3-2-1.

You remember what I mentioned with the 3-2-1 last week? Well, there were three days around Jesus' death. Three days.

[5 : 57] What was the two for? Two events. His death and resurrection. And one Savior. And I've got 3-2-1 for you today as well. So you're getting the best of both worlds with another 3-2-1.

Again, it's really around the death of Jesus. Three crosses. Two criminals. Two thieves. And again, one Savior.

So we read in the Gospels, when Jesus was crucified, there were two others crucified with him. Two. Crucifixion. Crucifixion. Hanging on a cross was a very cruel way of putting people to death. But that's what the Romans did, especially for criminals. And Jesus was treated as if he was a criminal. Because he was crucified between the two thieves.

One on each side of him. But although there were three crosses, there were very different people on these crosses. There were two thieves, and they two were very different, the one from the other. [7 : 01] Because the one criminal, the one thief on one side of Jesus, didn't want to know anything about Jesus. In fact, he was very angry with Jesus and very angry that he was there at all.

But the one on the other side actually came to ask Jesus for mercy. He asked Jesus, Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

And you know, that's a wonderful prayer for ourselves to remember as well. So the two thieves represent human beings who are lost. That's the thief that didn't come to know Jesus, that didn't want to know Jesus, that died like that.

And the other thief cried out, Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom. And you know, every day, every night, every morning, throughout every day, it's a very simple prayer. It doesn't matter what age we are, but it's a very powerful prayer. When you ask Jesus, Lord, remember me. Please remember me.

[8 : 07] And you know, when Jesus remembers us and blesses us, then all is well with us. Whatever happens then in our lives, we are safe in the remembrance Jesus has of his people.

So three crosses, two thieves, very different to each other, and again, one Savior. Because Jesus is the Savior.

He's the only Savior. He's the only one by which our lives can be put in a right relationship with God. And when you come to put your faith and trust in Jesus, you come to be accepted with God. You come to be regarded as righteous, having all the qualities of life that God requires. So in other words, Jesus is the only Savior, but he's the only Savior we need.

That's the great news for us all today, isn't it? Three crosses, two thieves, very different to each other, and one Savior.

[9 : 14] So again, three, two, and one. We're going to say the Lord's Prayer together now. Amen. Amen. Amen. Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen. Amen. We're going to sing once again now.

This time we're singing in Psalm 13. Psalm 13 on page 14. And the tune is St. Kilda. This is a psalm where the psalmist feels as if God has forgotten him.

Sometimes in life we might find things that happen to us as if God had actually forgotten us, especially when we suffer painful things.

[10 : 19] But at the end of the psalm, the psalmist still comes back to say that he would trust in the constant love of God. So, Psalm 13, The whole psalm to God's praise.

How long will you forget me, Lord?

Will you forget always? How long will you hide your face? How long will you hide your face?

And turn from near again? How long will you hide your face? How long will you hide your face?

How long will you hide your face? How long will you hide your face? How long will you hide your face? How long will you hide your face? How long will my opponent stand?

[11 : 37] Then triumph over me. O Lord, my God, consider me and give me.

You reply. Light up my eyes, you are I will stream the sleep of the water, To die.

Then would my enemy be fair, At last thy later blow, And so my foes would sing for joy, To see my overthrow.

But still I trust your constant love, You save and set me free, With joy I will let show the Lord, Who hath been good to me.

Amen. The reading of God's Word this morning is from Jeremiah chapter 29. The prophecy of Jeremiah chapter 29, And we're reading verses 1 to 19.

[13 : 39] So Jeremiah 29 at the beginning.

These are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem, To the surviving elders of the exiles, And to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, Whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.

This was after King Jeconiah and the queen mother, The eunuchs, the officials of Judah and Jerusalem, The craftsmen, and the metal workers had departed from Jerusalem. The letter was sent by the hand of Elasa, The son of Shaphan, And Gemariah, the son of Hilkiyah, Whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to Babylon, To Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon.

It said, Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, To all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon, 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, But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, And pray to the Lord on its behalf, For in its welfare you will find your welfare.

[15:09] For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are among you deceive you, And do not listen to the dreams that they dream, For it is a lie they are prophesying to you in my name.

I did not send them, declares the Lord. For thus says the Lord, When seventy 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. Because you have said, The Lord has raised up prophets for us in Babylon. Thus says the Lord concerning the king who sits on the throne of David, And concerning all the people who dwell in this city, Your kinsmen who did not go out with you into exile.

[16:28] Thus says the Lord of hosts, Behold, I am sending on them sword, famine, and pestilence, And I will make them like vile figs, That are so rotten they cannot be eaten.

I will pursue them with sword, famine, and pestilence, And will make them a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth, To be a curse, a terror, a hissing, And a reproach among all the nations where I have driven them.

Because they did not pay attention to my words, Declares the Lord, That I persistently sent to you by my servants the prophets, But you would not listen, Declares the Lord.

And may God bless to us, A reading of that portion of his word. Let's once again call upon him in prayer. Let's join together in prayer. Lord our God, we ask that you would sanctify our hearts, That you would enlighten our minds as we come once again to consider your word.

As we come to worship you, We pray that all aspects of our worship May be guided and blessed under the power of your Holy Spirit. We thank you today for this opportunity again we have, To gather together in this place of worship.

[17:44] And we thank you for the many promises that meet us, Lord, From your word, As we come together in this way. The promise especially that you will be a God to your people, That you will take them as your people, And that your promises for them will always be fulfilled, And will come to their conclusion as you have purposed.

And we thank you, Lord, Today that we come around your word, To have our lives further enriched by a knowledge of yourself. Lord, we pray today that our concern would be To go beyond the knowledge of your word itself, But to come through it to recognize you, To come to that saving knowledge of you, A knowledge that would enable us to place our confidence in you, And to look forward to eternity, Safe in the grace and in the salvation, That is in Jesus Christ, O Lord.

We ask today, Lord, For your blessing for us again today as a congregation. Lord, we thank you for all that you have been to us, To this congregation, Down through many generations.

We can look back on the history of this congregation, And many others. A history that is replete with your blessing. A history where you have declared yourself savingly to be God.

Where it has been demonstrated that your hand is not shortened, That it cannot save. Nor your ear heavy that it cannot listen. And Lord, we pray that this may be so for us as well in our generation.

[19 : 15] That even during these very days, In our placement here in the congregation, In this town, In wherever it is we live, We ask, Lord, That your blessing will make us rich, And make us strong, In the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

We pray, Lord, For people to come to know you, Savingly. Not only from within the congregation, But out with as well. We ask for the power of the gospel to come, And show yourself to us, Lord, Through it.

So that we may thrive under your blessing. That it may be true of us, That people will say of us, That we have been with Jesus. That we are the people of the Lord. That we are a people who are concerned that the truth of God Will stand forth in our land.

And Lord, We pray today that your blessing will be with us, As a church, As a denomination. Bless us, We pray, In all our activities, In all the congregations, That belong to us as a denomination.

We pray, Lord, For the healthy gospel church meetings, That come to various parts of the country. We pray that these may be beneficial to us, That we may learn, Oh God, What it is to live a healthy Christian life, And also what a healthy church ought to look like.

[20 : 36] We pray that your blessing will be with those who come to speak to us, And that throughout the church, Oh Lord, Our concern will truly be, To be healthy in the proper spiritual way, And also to be like that, Willing and open witnesses, To testify to you, In the world in which we live.

Bless our communities, Bless us, Lord, In all the engagements, In which we meet with different people, From week to week, And day to day. Bless us in our places of work, Help us to witness for you there, Give us, Lord, Wisdom, And love, And tact for those around us, Who still are opposed to you, And care not for the gospel, Or for their own souls.

We pray, Gracious one, That our regard for them, May truly feed into our prayers, Day by day, For the world in which we live, That we may see many coming to turn to the Lord, Coming to take their place, Amongst the people of God.

And we ask that your blessing will be, With those especially today, Who are facing difficult times, For whom there are many challenges, In their own private lives, Or in their families.

Oh God, Remember them, We pray, For we hear from time to time, Of those who have adversity, And difficulty to contend with, Whether through health issues, Mentally or physically, Other experiences in life, That they have gone through, Illnesses, Bereavements, These are all part, Oh Lord, Of the current world, And circumstances in which we live.

[22 : 11] And we thank you for your grace, And thank you that you have promised, That your grace, Is always sufficient for us, Always designed, To meet all our circumstances. And so we pray today, Oh Lord, For those especially, Who have such testing times, In their experience.

Remember those who, Are ill of our number, Those who are receiving treatment, Those who are recovering from treatment, From surgery, Those who are anticipating such, And days to come, And who may have anxiety, Over the times of waiting.

We ask, Oh Lord, That you would bless them, And bless their families. We pray for all today, Who mourn the passing of loved ones. We pray for Peggy McKinnon's family, Peggy who was a member here, For so long a time, Oh Lord, Since she began following, In 1956.

Gracious one, We thank you for that long life, Of witness, And testimony to your grace. And we pray that our family today, And ourselves as a congregation, As we give thanks for our long, And consistent life.

So Lord, We pray that you would, Bless such a testimony, And witness to us. Remember, We pray all others, In the congregation, Who face anxiety at this time, Or those who belong to us, In our families.

[23 : 30] Lord, We pray especially, For Catherine Ferguson, And David, And young Duncan, That we give thanks, That they came unscathed, Physically out of the accident, Yesterday, And we pray, Gracious one, That you would bless them, And bless Annabel, And all her family, And all of David's family too, At this anxious time.

And we pray for Catherine, Especially, And Duncan, As they have survived, The accident, And we give thanks for that. Nevertheless, Lord, We realize that, Stress and shock, Will necessarily follow, To some degree.

And we pray that you'd help them, To deal with these issues. We ask that you'd bless, All others, Lord, In the congregation, At this time, Who have had difficulties, In time gone by, And for whom, Reflection upon them, May be painful.

Bless us, We pray, Under the guidance, Of your own Holy Spirit, And comfort us, Against all the stresses, And changes of life. We remember too, Lord, At this time, All who seek to reach out, With the gospel, Amongst ourselves, And other congregations too, We pray that you'd bless, The meetings anticipated, In the month of May.

We pray for Calla, And for Roddy, As they undertake, Lord, These meetings once again. We pray, For all who come, That they will know, Your blessing. We thank you, For the provision of, Lorraine, As congregational treasurer.

[24 : 56] We thank you, For her input, To the congregation, Over these years, Particularly the many ways, In which she has helped, Administratively. We pray for her now, As she takes on, The role of treasurer. And we pray that you would, Grant our Lord each day, Your blessing, Your strengthening, Your guidance.

We give thanks, Lord, For all who contribute, To your cause, And for the encouragements, You give us, In the support of your cause, Financially, And in other physical ways, As well. And we pray, That these may be, Encouragements to us, In days to come.

We give thanks, For Duny, And for Gordon, And for all the ways, In which they have helped. We pray for all others, Lord, In the congregation, Who help, In different ways, Sometimes unnoticed, Behind the scenes.

But we thank you for them, And we pray especially, For Marianne, For Scott, For Lizzie, And for all who help, In different ways, In accompaniment, Of their tasks. Lord, Bless us, We pray, As we contribute, In these ways, To your cause.

Our prayer is, That your name, Will be exalted, And glorified. That your church, Will be strengthened, That your people, Will be encouraged. Grant to us, Lord, These mercies, Seeking pardon, And cleansing, From all our sins, For Jesus' sake.

[26 : 09] Amen. Once again, We'll praise God, Before we turn to the scriptures. And this time, We're praising him, From Psalm 77, Psalm 77, Page 100, Psalm 77, And sing psalms, Verses 7 to 14.

Tune this time, Is Glenn Cairn. And again, It's a psalm, In which we find the psalmist, Very much lamenting, The fact that God, Appears to have, Turned from him, And yet, Like Psalm 13, We find at the end, Of the psalm, That he comes with confidence, Once again, To look, To the Lord, As he considers, As he says, The works of God, Done long ago, In verse 11, And as he meditated, On that, That's what really gave him, To refocus once again, Upon God, And all that God, Had been to him, And all that God, Had promised, Promised to be, For him in the future.

So verses 7 to 14, Forever will the Lord, Reject, And never show his grace, As he withdrawn, His steadfast love, And turned from me, His face, To the end of verse 14.

Amen. Forever will the Lord, Reject, And never show his grace, As he withdrawn, His steadfast love, And turned from me, His face, For all time, Has his promise failed, His God no longer kind, As he in his great wrath dismissed, From passion, From passion, From his mind, Then to my heart, There gave his heart, On this I will rely, The years of the bright, And the fire, Of him, His most high, I will recall the Lord's greatest, Your words of long ago, I'll meditate, On all your acts, Your mighty deeds are shown, O God,

[29 : 23] O God, What most holy are your ways, What God confers with you, You are the God of miracles, His power, His power, The nations view.

Now if you turn with me please, To Jeremiah chapter 29, We'll begin reading again at verse 10, Jeremiah 29 at 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.

So on verses 10 to 14, But especially these verses 11 and 12, 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.

Well I'm sure you're very familiar with these words, Not just in the Bible, But they're often found on cards, That you find that you'll give out to people, Whether it's times of showing sympathy, Or support, Or whatever, Calendar, Very often calendars with texts, Will have that same text on them as well, 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.

And whether you find them here in the Bible, Or on posters, Or calendars or cards, They are really, really precious words, Aren't they? Because they actually include so much That's comforting, And

applicable to so many different situations That we face.

[31 : 30] In this life. And they're words that are designed by God To bring us assurance, To bring us a sense of comfort and well-being, As we go through the different circumstances of life.

And especially as we fall on hard times That He has purposed in His providence for us, Just as He had here for the people of Judah, Who are going to spend all this time, 70 years in Babylon, As exiles there, And find so much there that was challenging for them.

And here is God saying, Yet after these 70 years, I will fulfill, I will visit you, And I will fulfill to you my promise. And you know, When you lift these verses out of the context, You don't quite get the same emphasis As you do when you read the chapter As we've done today.

Because we always need to give verses in the Bible Their true context. When you see them on a calendar, Or on a card, Yes, they're beautiful words, They're precious words, They're valuable words, But you need to take the context with you To get the actual setting for them.

And when you get the actual setting for them, One of the things you realize Is that these are very surprising words. This in many ways is a surprising promise To these people.

[32 : 46] They had turned their back on the Lord. They had refused, As we saw towards the end of our reading today. In verse 19, They did not pay attention, Says the Lord, To my words, That I persistently sent to you By my servants, The prophet, But you would not listen, Declares the Lord.

Over many years, The Lord had sent prophets To warn them of the dangers, Of turning their back on Him, Of following the ways of the heathen, Of the idols, The pagans around them.

But they hadn't listened. They closed their minds to that. And so God did as He had said. He brought them to the captivity of Babylon Under Nebuchadnezzar for these 70 years.

And as you actually see that, You realize that, Well, it is a surprising promise, Because here is God, These people having done what they did, And God having said this about them, That they had spurned Him, And turned their back on Him, And would listen to His words.

And yet here is God saying, But I am going to still bless you, And I am going to be rich towards you, To fulfill my promises for you, As my covenant people.

[33 : 54] Now this is part, As we see, Of a letter that Jeremiah wrote, To these exiles. In verse 4b, You find there, This is the letter that was sent, To all the exiles, Sent into exile, From Jerusalem to Babylon.

And that's how the chapter begins. These are the words of the letter, That Jeremiah sent. So Jeremiah composed this letter, Sent it specifically under the Lord's direction, To these people who were in Babylon, With these details for them.

And it was especially to give them, Not just a sense of why they had ended up there, But also what the future actually had for them. And in the letter, of course, It mentions too, The false prophets that Jeremiah, Had such a hard time with, All the course of his ministry.

The false prophets that, Were assuring Israel, You know, What you're doing, It's fine, Don't worry, It'll work out okay. Never mind the likes of Jeremiah and Isaiah, Never mind what they're saying, Never mind the words that they're saying to you, Just listen to us instead.

And here is Jeremiah, Who spoke the words of the Lord to them, Don't let your prophets, In verse 8, And your diviners who are among you, Deceive you, And do not listen to the dreams that they dream, For it's a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name.

[35 : 15] I did not send them, Declares the Lord. That's part of the letter that he sent, To these exiles, Just so that they would know, Exactly what was what. Not that they hadn't been told before.

And of course that follows down, Through the course of the centuries, Right up to our own day. Because one of the challenges we face, In preaching the gospel, In being people of the gospel, Such as you yourselves are, Is that we face false teaching in our day, Just as surely as they did, In the days of the apostles, The days of the prophets, And even further back.

And we have to always keep in mind, What the Lord says, What our view of the Bible itself is, And why the Bible is so precious to us, And why we do not alter it, Or change its teaching, Even if we have various translations of it, From time to time.

Jeremiah spoke God's truth. You see, The false prophet had said to them, It won't take long. Okay, You're going to be in Babylon. You're now in Babylon. But this is really a short-term thing.

You'll soon be back home. Don't worry about it. And now Jeremiah is saying, The Lord is saying, You're here for the long haul. You're here for 70 years.

[36 : 32] A lot's going to happen during those years, But it's going to take that long, A whole generation at least or more, Before you'll ever see back home in Jerusalem again.

And the question then for them is, Well, What then is going to happen When these years are ended? What's going to be the outcome When the years in Babylon have come to an end? And equally so, Meantime, While they're in Babylon, What should they be doing? What should their outlook be? Not just looking towards the future And God's promise being fulfilled, But in the meantime, As they live in Babylon, What sort of lives should they live?

What does God require of them? Well, For that, You can see from verse 4 onwards, Thus says the Lord to all the exiles, Build houses and live in them.

You see, He's saying, You're in here for the long haul. It's not a short-term thing. So build houses. Plant gardens. Eat their produce. Take wives. And then he says in verse 7, Seek the welfare of the city Where I have sent you into exile.

[37 : 47] And pray to the Lord on its behalf. For in its welfare, You will find your welfare. We're not going to look at these words, But they're very important words for ourselves.

What sort of lives should we be living in the meantime? Even if we are as we are, Surrounded by people who don't want the Lord, Who don't want the gospel, Who have antipathy to the gospel, Or antagonistic to the gospel, Or even apathetic, Who couldn't care less one way or the other.

What sort of lives should we live? Well, it says here, We seek the welfare of the city. In other words, We seek the peace and prosperity, Especially in a spiritual and moral way, For the people we belong to, For the nation we belong to.

Because in their welfare, He says, You will have your welfare. That's why Paul, In writing to Timothy, Says that One of the things to pray for, Is that we pray for days of peace and well-being. Because the gospel itself, Is a gospel that needs a setting, Not that God can't bless it in times of adversity, But the conditions for the gospel, Conditions of peace, Not of strife and of warfare, And of hatred and so on.

[38 : 57] So he's saying to them there, Seek the welfare of the place. Pray to the Lord on its behalf, For in its welfare, You will have your welfare.

But then in the long term, And the verses we're coming to today for a wee while, He says, But when these seventy years are completed, That's fine. For the time that you're in Babylon, Seek the welfare of the place.

Pray for the place. Look for peace and prosperity. But in the days to come, When these years are completed, I will fulfill to you my promise.

And I will 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.

Two things we're looking at very briefly. First of all, The God of plans. Secondly, The plans of God. The God of plans, And the plans of God confining it to these verses in this context.

[40 : 04] Well, The God of plans is the God that Jeremiah describes for the people in the letter. The God of the Bible. The God who has revealed Himself to us. Because we're living in days when God is not believed in.

When you'll often find that our view of God, And our belief and our trust in God, Is regarded as just figments of our own imagination. You'll find all sorts of descriptions, That are denigrating of God, Describing God as just that figure that people have in their imaginations, That they think lives, And is just in the sky somewhere.

Well, Of course, We know that God is real. That God's realness includes His relation with His people. God is not just that He exists, But He's a relational God.

He's a God who enters into relationship with His people, In covenant with His people. He interacts with His people. He actually speaks to His people through His Word. That's why the Bible is so valuable.

That's why we believe in the Holy Spirit, To bless the Gospel to us. To bless His Word. To bless us, That our understanding of it will be real and will grow. He's the God in the Bible, Who is throughout the prophets especially, Described as so different to, So opposite to these idols.

[41 : 18] Why does God have so much to say, In vehement denunciation of these idols? Because they are the alternative to Himself. Idols are just idols.

They're not real things. But they're in the place of God. And the worship of them, Is in the place of the worship of God. And so, We have a God today.

You know, The great thing about the Bible is this. There's so much in the Bible. But the greatest thing about the Bible, And it applies to everything else that's revealed in the Bible, Is that the Bible is where God reveals Himself to us.

The Bible is where God has come to us and said, Here am I. Come and know me. Come and get to know me.

Come and know me increasingly. Come and listen to what I've got to say. The very thing people of Judah didn't actually listen to. You have a Bible today.

[42 : 16] You have a Bible freely available to you. More than likely, You've got more than one copy in your possession at home. Why is the Bible precious to you?

Because God has set Himself forth in the Bible, Revealed Himself in the Bible, So that He will be found by you. So that you will come to know Him.

Because He is the God who speaks, Who hears, Who visits, Who promises, Who declares. And that means that God acts decisively, And infallibly, And consistently.

How precious is that to us today? A world that's full of changes. And maybe you're someone today who is, In a sense, Somewhat like these people in Babylon.

And it feels a long time, perhaps, Since you've had the problems you've got. And it may be difficult to wait, As it always is, Waiting for things to change.

[43 : 20] Waiting for the Lord to reveal Himself to you more. But whatever it is in your life, Over which you're waiting, And which feels as if God really, In the psalmist sense, Has turned away from you.

That's very difficult to live with. But here is God assuring you, To all who have come to trust in Him, Even if it's going to be a life in this world, Of long-term challenge, And most of us will find that.

Well, at the end of the day, I know, He says, The plans that I have for you. I have plans for you, That far exceed anything you could possibly Devise for yourselves.

That's what He says to all, Who have come to trust in Him. And today, I hope, If you're feeling the time long, If you're struggling with your faith, If you're struggling to comprehend Some of the things happening in your life, And why they're there, And how they can work for your good, What the outcome's going to be, And if you're struggling to even see ahead, As far as the fulfillment of God's promises is concerned, I hope today that you'll derive comfort, And strength, And knowledge of God, From what we're saying briefly, This morning on these passages.

He's the God, The God of plans. This is the God we worship. The God who has plans for His people. And as we'll see now, The plans of God, Are plans which are just quite wonderful.

[44 : 44] The word plans itself, Is important as we come to this second heading, The plans of God. Because the word plans in Hebrew, Is a word that also means thoughts.

And the older translations had it, I know the thoughts that I have toward you. But they're plans in which God's thoughts are placed.

In other words, One of the wonderful emphases is there, When you think about the plans that God has for His people, And they're plans that He has devised from all eternity. God doesn't make up a plan as He goes along, As history develops.

God doesn't make up His plans for you or for me, In reaction to some of the things that happen in our lives, Or some of the things we find ourselves doing. God's plan has been intact for all of us, From all eternity.

Everything's already in the plan before we're born. Here is God saying, That wonderful plan, These are my thoughts.

[45 : 44] You know, There's a plan that has been set out with coherent wisdom, On the part of this God, Whose thoughts are above our thoughts, Whose ways are above our ways, And yet whose thoughts are upon us, As we place our trust and confidence in Him.

One of the things that should comfort us from day to day, Is that there isn't a single moment, From the time of our conception, Through to the time of our death in this world, When we are not in the thoughts of God.

When God isn't thinking positively about His people, They are never outside of His thoughts. And His thoughts are built into His plan.

It's a plan, Really what He says here, I know the plans that I have for you. And every time you come across God saying, I know, Again, That's a precious word, Because it really includes relationship knowledge.

It includes the knowledge that He has of these people, Because He made a covenant with them, He gave them promises, And these are the promises that are going to come to be fulfilled, Despite the seventy years, And in fact, The seventy years are part of the plan.

[46 : 55] The seventy years themselves are not something outside of the plan, Or an adjunct to the plan, As if they've been tacked on somewhere, Or as if the promises of God have been put aside for the moment, For these seventy years to have their place, But they weren't really planned by God.

They were planned by God. They were in the plan from all eternity. Every single detail of their lives was in the plan. It was, if you like, A well thought out plan.

And sometimes, That's a thought that, Personally, I derive much comfort from. When things don't seem to be going the way that you would like, The way that you would have purposed yourself, When there are difficulties that surprise you, That hurt you, I come back, And you come back, I'm sure as well, To say, Well, I know it's within God's plan, But I know God's plan, Is a well thought out plan.

This didn't happen by accident. This didn't happen unintentionally on the part of God. This didn't happen as something that was not really in His plan from the beginning.

I know the plans I have for you, says God. They are thought out plans. Plans in which divine wisdom and divine intelligence, You know, This is such a precious thing when you think of the plans of God, And that everything's in the plans of God, In your life and mine from the beginning, That it's actually divine intelligence that's looking after us.

[48 : 37] God's intelligent, thought out plan. There's nothing like that. Nothing like that anywhere else. I know the plans that I have for you.

His plans are never in doubt. His plans are never anything other than what He thinks they should be for you. And that's one of the wonderful things you find in the book of Psalms, for example.

Psalms 139 is an instance of it. Psalm 139, where you find, as you know, the psalm is beginning with a reference to the knowledge of God, The knowledge that God has of Him.

And how he finds that so overwhelming in many ways, That God knows Him so well as to surround Him with that knowledge. He's just beset with it. He's surrounded by it.

He's caught up in, Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up. You discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my line.

[49 : 38] And all the way down, as you know, I've read that many times. He goes through, working through the implications of God's knowledge. You've searched me before I ever spoke. You knew the words I was going to speak.

You knew the thoughts of my mind. And then you come to verses 17 to 18. How precious to me are your thoughts, O God.

In other words, he's saying the same as we sing in Jeremiah. The plans of God, the thoughts of God, the divine intelligence that has devised this plan for His people, individually and collectively.

The psalmist is saying, How precious to me are your thoughts. Here's the man who was in many ways disquieted by the fact that God knew every detail of his life already. That he was looking into him. That he was sifting through his thoughts.

Weighing them up. Measuring them. Making him uncomfortable at the very prospect of it. And yet he's saying, How precious, O God, are your thoughts to me.

[50 : 39] How vast is the sum of them. They are more than the sand. I awake and I am still with you. In other words, I've had my sleep.

And when I wake on this new day, I find I'm still within your thoughts. I'm still within your plans. Nothing's changed. Even while I've been asleep.

Nothing's changed. Even though now there's a new circumstance in my life that I hadn't anticipated and wouldn't have chosen for myself. Nothing's changed. I know the plans that I have for you, declares the Lord.

Now what are they? Plans for wholeness and not for evil. To give you a future and a hope. See, the outcome is wholeness.

It's completeness. A life that's blessed. And that's what God has in His mind, in His divine, intelligent plan for His people.

[51 : 42] Everything is part of that plan. But the outcome is wholeness. See, verse 10, he's saying, He's going to come and fulfill His promise. And the word promise there in verse 10 is interesting.

It literally means, My good word. My good word. And when you come across the word good like that, in the Bible, especially describing something to do with God, it's just filled.

It's packed with meaning. It's a powerful word. My good word. Imagine the promise of God and the way that it describes it there as literally my good word.

Whatever promises God gives to you today, they are His good word. There's nothing bad about them. There's nothing harmful in them. Because God is the God of good.

The good God. The God who has a good word for His people. And we may often lose our focus on that.

[52 : 45] Especially during the testing times of life. The unexpected events. The losses. The pains. The challenges of life.

We had something of that in the psalm. We sang Psalm 77. And as we said, it's interesting how the psalmist there, similar to Psalm 13 as well, as we said.

I cry aloud to God and He will hear me. My soul refuses to be comforted. And then he goes on to say, Will the Lord spurn forever? Will He never again be favorable?

Has His steadfast love forever ceased? Are His promises at an end for all time? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has He in anger shut up His compassion?

Then He answers Himself. You know, it's a good thing to talk to yourself. Talk to yourself like the psalmist talks to himself. It's not a sign of madness.

[53 : 45] It's not a sign of being over-eccentric. Because all the way through the psalms, you'll find many psalms, where the psalmist is speaking to his soul. O thou my soul, bless God the Lord.

He's talking to himself in a way that really addresses God through that. And it's good for you and for me to do that. To sit down in the presence of God, especially when there are things that really we need to speak to God about that cause us to be concerned or disconcerted or pained.

We just talk them out with God. He's the God who listens. The God who hears. God who invites us to unburden our hearts to Him.

This is what the psalmist is doing in Psalm 77. Has God forgotten to be gracious? Then I said, as He answers Himself, I will appeal to this, to the years of the right hand of the Most High.

I will remember the deeds of the Lord. Yes, I will remember your wonders of old. I will ponder all your work and meditate on your mighty deeds, Your way is holy, O God.

[54 : 54] What God is great like our gods? And he goes on like that. You see, that's his answer. He's come really round to refocus his attention and his mind upon this God. And when he's thought back upon the works of God, whether it's in his own life or even out with that, I think he's thinking about the works of God in the wider sense that he's come to know about.

And the conclusion he's really coming to is something like this. Well, this is the God who has done all of these great deeds. Why should I not trust Him? How can I actually possibly think that He's turned His back on me?

If this is the God He is, as I see from His works, then surely it's only right for me to turn to Him again and say, Lord, I will remember these, and I will build on what I know of you, and I will not doubt your plans for me, even if I don't fully understand them.

And he refocuses himself on that. And that's what Jeremiah is doing really with this letter. He's really saying to these exiles, look, there is no quick fix for your situation.

You're here for these years that are in God's plan for you. But this is the outcome, because there are plans to do you good. There are plans for wholeness and not for evil.

[56 : 17] A glorious future. And all the way through, you find the same sort of thing mentioned. Chapter 33, verses 6 to 13, where he says really wonderfully what they have to do in building places for themselves after they've come back again.

God's going to refill Jerusalem and so on. As you read through chapter 33, these great promises of God, thus says the Lord, in this place that is now waste, without man or beast, and in all of its cities, there shall be habitations of shepherds resting their flocks in the cities of the hill country, in the cities of the Sheffalat, and so on.

You know, God is assuring us today, yes, our hearts may be hurting. We may be anxious. We may be concerned. We may wonder what God is doing. How this can possibly be for my wholeness or my betterment.

But there is God saying, I know the plans that I have for you. And the plans that I have for you, the outcome is not an outcome of anything less than wholeness, completeness, blessing, filled with life.

That's our God. That's the plans of our God. The God of plans. And the plans of God. And, you know, he finishes by what you might say is very much a presentation of what we call Reformed theology.

[57 : 45] Reformed theology where we believe the grace of God is really what sets up the kind of situation or relationship we should have with Him. Grace of God that renews our hearts, that changes us, that converts us, that turns us so that we then call upon Him and come to know Him and to follow Him.

Well, this is what he's saying. Verse 12, Then you will call upon Me and pray to Me and I will hear you. You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart.

And I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes. What's that saying and why is that Reformed theology as we mentioned it?

Well, because it's saying this. Their hopes do not lie in their ability to search for God. Their hopes must lie in God's willingness to be found by them.

That's the gospel. That's the gospel message. That's what we said at the beginning. Our hopes lie not in our own ability, not even in our own ability to understand the Bible.

[58 : 51] Our hopes lie in the fact that God has been pleased to reveal Himself to us. That He has come to reveal Himself purposely to us. That He has come to reveal Himself as the God of plans and reveal the plans of God to us so that we may find Him, so that we may trust Him, so that we may come to know Him.

And that's what we find in Christ. Remember John chapter 13. I'll close with this. John chapter 12, rather, where you find Jesus speaking of Himself again as the light of the world.

And in the point of John's gospel, this is an important juncture in John's gospel because this really is Christ's last word to the world in John's gospel.

From then on, He's speaking only to His disciples. This is what He says. Jesus cried out and said, Whoever believes in Me believes not in Me, but in Him who sent Me.

I have come into the world as light that whoever believes in Me may not remain in darkness. If anyone hears My voice and does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world.

[60 : 05] And He went on to say that, For I have not spoken on My own authority, but the Father who sent Me has given Me this to say.

And earlier on in the chapter, this is what He said. Walk, in verse 35, Jesus said to them, The light is among you for a while longer, a little while longer.

Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he's going. While you have the light, believe in the light that you may become sons of light.

That's the gospel. God has chosen graciously to reveal Himself to us. He is the light. And it's come into the world in the person of Jesus.

And today He's saying to me and He's saying to you, While you have the light, believe in the light that you may become the children of light.

[61 : 12] May God bless these thoughts on His Word to us. We're going to conclude now singing in Psalm 139. Again, let's sing Psalms. This time Psalm 139, 139a, verses 15 to 18.

Here is David, as we said earlier. Wondering at the way that God's knowledge of Him is so perfect, so entire. Going back even to the time before He was born, when He was being formed in the womb.

And so in verse 15, we come to these words, When in the secret place my frame was made before my birth, you saw my body yet unformed within the depths of earth.

And all the days that I should live, which you ordained for me, were written in your book, O Lord, before they came to be. In other words, same as Jeremiah, I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord.

Singing to the tune, St. Andrew, verses 15 to 18. When in the secret place my frame was made before my birth, You saw my body yet unformed within the depths of earth.

[62 : 56] And all the days that I should live, which you are made for me, where they came to be.

Where they came to be. Where they came to be. Oh, God, how precious a

I scan them from afar. And as I seek to trust them all, how numberless they are.

Oh, I took out that hill would be for thunder rings of sound.

When I am with you, still sit within your hand.

[64 : 40] I'll go to the main door after the benediction. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.