

For I Know The Plans I Have For You

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Preacher: Rev. Jim Martin

[0 : 00] I want to read to you tonight from Jeremiah, and it's Jeremiah chapter 29, and some of the verses around about verse 11 are very well known, verse 11, 12, and 13, but if we could put it into context tonight.

So it's Jeremiah 29. This is the text of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders among the exiles and to the priests, the prophets, and all the other people Nebuchadnezzar had carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.

Now this was after King Jehoiakim and the queen mother, the court officials, and the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen and the artisans, had gone into exile from Jerusalem.

He entrusted the letter to Elasa, son of Shaphan, and to Gamariah, the son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah, king of Judah, sent to King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon.

It said, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all of those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. Build houses and settle down. Plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters.

[1 : 30] Find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there. Do not decrease.

Also seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it. Because if it prospers, you too will prosper.

Yes, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says. Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encouraged them to have.

They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them, declares the Lord. This is what the Lord says. When 70 years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place.

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord. Plans to prosper you and not to harm you. Plans to give you a hope and a future.

[2 : 39] Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me. And I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all of your heart. I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and bring you back from captivity.

I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you, declares the Lord, and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.

Amen. Before we look at that passage, let's stand and we'll sing again. All I once held dear. Over the years, I've had a lot of strange phone calls.

And if I've told you this story before, I hope you'll say it was worth telling her again. And it was a man, he was the head of a tour company and he wanted to come to see me.

And I know I look a bit odd, but this guy really looked odd when he arrived at the door. And he said that he knew I'd been interested in Israel and that he was going to run a tour and he wanted me to lead the tour.

[4 : 19] Well, he might as well have asked me to drive the bus for all the good I thought I would be. But he was quite sure that I was the man to lead the tour.

And I don't know why, there was something about this guy. Maybe he was just so odd, I don't know. But I said, okay.

But I would need all the help that I could get. And I said, are you sure you'll get a tour together?

Well, it did prove to be of the Lord because he said, well, let's try and fill one bus and the bus was going to seat 50.

But all of a sudden, another 50 people wanted to come. And they were from Northern Ireland. And quite a few of the people that were coming, I knew them.

I knew them quite well. I don't know, just over the years, I got to know a lot of these people. And I don't want to sound judgmental, but they were churchy people.

[5 : 28] And they were good people. Not like the party we were reading about in Titus this morning. They were good living folk, you would call them.

But they never seemed to have a great interest in the Bible or in prayer or evangelism or healing or so on. And I was surprised that they were coming. I was even more surprised to have 100.

And I wasn't sure how many I would bring back. And I was very apprehensive. And I'm going to tell you, it was jolly hard work. Because wherever you went, you had to read the scripture that related to the place.

And you had to give a message. Well, it wasn't difficult, you know. When you got to the pool of Bethesda, you turned up and you read it.

And you know, Jesus said to the man, do you want to be healed? There was a lot of good messages. And I really enjoyed it. It was very hard work.

[6 : 33] And I was looking forward to the end. I think it was a 14-day tour. It was 7 in the morning till 10 at night. Just the usual hours of a pastor, if I can put something in there.

And I was looking forward to the last couple of nights. Because the last couple of nights, we were booked into a hotel at a holiday resort.

Now, you must say, I always knew he wasn't spiritual. He's in the Holy Land and he's looking forward to two nights. But the longer this tour went on, the more I looked forward to it. And there was a beach service down for the last night.

And you truly had to conduct it. And I was prepared. And you know, Natania is a beautiful, beautiful place. If you can just imagine a perfect night in Portobello, this was better.

And it's just such a beautiful, beautiful beach. And the hotel. It was one of these kind of bijou hotels right on the beach. It wasn't a massive hotel.

[7 : 46] And we had the whole hotel to ourselves. The food was great. And we had the service. And you know, just at the beginning of the service, the sun was going down.

It was a beautiful night. And you could hear the waves. And I preached a very evangelical sermon about coming to know Jesus in a personal way.

And at the end of it, I said, you know, if you want to go deeper with God or maybe make a commitment for the first time, I'm going to ask you just to take a few steps forward here in the sand. And we can pray a prayer of commitment together. And it was warm. And you could hear the waves coming. And although I say it myself, the sermon, the message wasn't bad.

And people listened at the right bits and they laughed at the right bits, as it were. And I just felt it was the perfect night. I thought, if heaven is better than this, it'll be amazing.

[8 : 52] And when I made that altar call that night, you know, I would say over 90 of those 100 people took a few steps forward.

And I know that for some, it was the first time. And I was very moved. I can look back on it, but this time the sun had set. There was a beautiful sky.

And I led those folks in a prayer. In the party, part of the party from Northern Ireland, there was a big fella called Harold.

There must have been six foot forward. So whenever he spoke to me, I had to look up to heaven. And he didn't come forward. He was already a Christian and he was a mature Christian.

But he came up to me and he said something to me that took me aback. You know, just imagine I'm thinking, this is the best thing next to heaven.

[9 : 51] This is amazing. And this big fella came up and he put his hand on my shoulder. And he said to me, God has more for you.

And you know, I'm not a spiritual giant. I thought of that. Remember Jimmy Cricket with the wellies? There's more. It did say in an Irish accent, there's more.

He says, God has more for you. And I wasn't terribly sure what he meant. But it was like he spoke into my life because I was drained at the end of that time.

I'd given all that I had. And it was a very successful tour, but having a hundred people that you were responsible for wasn't easy.

And I was pretty drained. But I was at such a high level spiritually that night on the beach in Natania. I thought, goodness, it can't get any better than this.

[11:01] And this big Irish fella come up and like Jimmy Cricket said, there's more. You know, that never left me. And during my ministry, I was young, very young at the time that I was in Israel.

That word has been remarkably fulfilled time and time again. That the God of heaven has got more for you.

And I thought tonight, I don't want to to give you something and say, this is new revelation. This is teaching you've never had before. This is something that you that's like a doctrine because it's not. Something that happened to me in my experience and it's happened to a lot of people. It happened to the Jews in Babylon. And these Jews had been ripped out of their homes in Jerusalem and taken by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon.

And you know the old song, by the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and cried. And you know, Jeremiah writes to them and says, God has more.

[12:29] For you. And they probably didn't like it when they read the letter at first. He says, build houses. Settle down. Plant gardens.

And they're saying, this is for the long term. Eat what they produce. Is marry and have sons and daughters.

Find wives for yourselves. It didn't really look all that good. And then he tells them that they're going to be there for 70 years. And he told them that people would come, false prophets, and would encourage them and give them dreams.

And the dreams would be, you're going home next year. You're going home in six months. You're going to defeat Nebuchadnezzar. I've got a word from the Lord. This is only going to last 10 days. And they knew that this letter from Jeremiah was the real deal.

They knew that they weren't going home in 10 days or 10 years. They'd been told in a prophetic word that they were going home in 70 years.

[13:36] But at the end of the letter, Jeremiah was given a word for them. I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord.

plans to prosper you and not to harm you. Plans to give you hope and a future. And I want to say that to some of you here tonight, maybe to you all, that the God of the Bible is a God who's got plans for you.

And if you say you're too old, then you're wrong. If you say you're not spiritual enough, then you're wrong. If you say that you're too busy, then you're wrong.

I believe that the God of the Bible is a God who has plans for you. There are plans to take you deeper with himself and to plans, plans to take you into other areas of ministry.

You know, if I can break off just for a moment, the hardest thing for me to do in a sense is to go to church now that I'm retired.

[14:51] Because I'd rather be preaching, I'd rather be pastoring, I'd rather be visiting, I'd rather be praying for the sick, I'd rather be doing what I did for almost 50 years and it's quite hard to go to church.

And the Lord must have thought that I was a kind of Christian Victor Meldrew when I prayed, you know. And, because there were Sunday mornings, I just felt it couldn't get any worse.

And I used to say, Lord, what do you want me to do? Because I believe in a God who's got plans. And I was invited to a little church in the East Newk and there's only six or seven people go and, you know, and I said this with my heart, I said, Lord, I'm here.

You know, I'm willing to take this lot on. And I still go there but they've never asked me, maybe that's no surprise. But, I put my hand up and volunteered and that didn't happen.

And then I began to meet different, different people. Hitler used to speak about people who were untermensch. They were the people at the bottom of the pile and he used to think that they were barely human.

[16:17] And no doubt, sometimes the people at the bottom of the pile feel that they're barely human. And I met different ones. And God has opened up something new.

He had plans for me. He had work that he wanted me to do. And he opened up doors. And I wasn't having a kind of solo old age new career because there's two or three others doing it with me so that when we do go away, the work carries on among the people.

At the bottom of the pile. You know, the biggest industry in the East Nuke of Fife is no longer fishing.

It's the drug industry. And recently, I walked past a fishing shed, a big fishing shed, a fishing shed about the size of this church. And it was being raided by the police in Pitt and Wim. We wouldn't know a police car if we saw. Never see a policeman on the beat. It was being raided by the police. So it was quite exciting. I mean, a car going through the village is quite exciting. [17:37] But here were all these police cars. And here was a cannabis factory in Marygate in Pitt and Wim.

And I can say personally tonight that the God of the Bible is the God who has plans. And he wants to take you on. If you say you're too old, then you might miss his best. You might just get plan B or miss his plans completely.

Let me look at just, we looked at Jeremiah and the letter. We looked at the exiles. And can you imagine how much that meant to these people? They had been ripped out of Jerusalem, taken to a foreign land, and the people were jeering at them.

Sing us a song of Zion. Sing us some of your spiritual songs. By the rivers of Babylon there we sat down and wept. And what does the God of Jeremiah say to those that are sitting by the rivers of Babylon and weeping?

[18:45] I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord. Plans to prosper you and not to harm you. Plans to give you a hope and a future. I think we find that in a lot of the Bible.

Have a look at David in 1 Samuel 16. 1 Samuel 16. I think it's around about verse 13.

Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed David in the presence of his brothers. And from that day on the spirit of the Lord came upon David in power.

That was quite a day for David. They're in Bethlehem in his home city, hometown. And Samuel, Samuel the top prophet, the top preacher, the most holy of men, anoints him because that's what he's been told to do.

And from that day on he has a fresh experience of the Holy Spirit. but if you turn to 2 Samuel at chapter 2, 2 Samuel chapter 2 and verse 1, see what happens there at Hebron.

[20:19] in the course of time, David inquired of the Lord, shall I go up to one of the towns of Judah, he asked. The Lord said, go up, and David asked, where shall I go to Hebron?

The Lord answered. So David went up there with his two wives, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail, the widow of Nabal of Carmel.

David also took the men who were with him, each with his family, and they settled in Hebron and its towns. Then the men of Judah came to Hebron, and there the anointed David king over the house of Judah.

There was that private anointing of the Holy Spirit through Samuel in Bethlehem. And now here's a further implementation of God's plan for David as he is anointed to be king of Israel.

And if you turn over the page to chapter 5 and verse 3, when all the elders of Israel had come to King David at Hebron, the king made a compact with them at Hebron before the Lord, and they anointed David king over Israel.

[21:47] God had plans for that man.

the anointing broke so many yokes, and he was anointed at Bethlehem, anointed at Hebron, and anointed to be the king over Israel.

God had plans for that man. You might say, I'm no King David. Well, I could say, well, thank goodness. Thank goodness, because he certainly wasn't perfect.

But don't make yourself an exception. God loves each one of us as if there's only one person in the world to love. And God had plans for David, and God has plans for you.

If you say that you're too old, then you're wrong. If you say that you're too unspiritual, then you're wrong. If you say that you're too busy, then you might miss out on God's plan.

[22:46] If you look at Jeremiah, the God of the Bible says, I know the plans I have for you. Plans to prosper you and not to harm you. Plans to give you a hope and a future.

What about the New Testament? I was thinking about Peter. I mean, Peter really let the Lord down. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, look at chapter 20 of John's gospel and see what happened. Peter, Peter, who had denied Christ.

Now, that wasn't really part of the plan that he would be a Christ denier. See what happens. Look at chapter 20 and it's round about the end of the chapter.

Wait till I find it. On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were locked together, this is verse 19, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among

them and said, peace be with you.

[23 : 52] After he said this, he showed them his hands and side and the disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again, Jesus said, peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.

And with that, he breathed on them and said, receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.

If we could just avoid tonight making a doctrine or a real teaching out of this, just accept that they're frightened, they're at their lowest point, things couldn't be any worse, they've got the doors locked, they think the Jews are coming for them, they know that their days or hours are numbered and Jesus comes in and he says, peace, and then he breathes the Holy Spirit on them and he says, receive the Holy Spirit.

Just a powerful encounter with God. And if you turn over the page to the book of the Acts, you'll know this well from the day of Pentecost, Acts 2 and verse 4, it tells you about the disciples, this includes Peter, all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

And we've spent a lot of our time arguing about this matter of speaking in tongues. What about this, that Peter, who had been breathed upon in that upper room, who had heard the word peace come from Christ, who had heard the words of Christ receive the Holy Spirit.

[25 : 48] What does it say about him here? It says he was filled with the Holy Spirit. Turn over to chapter 4 and verse 8.

As Peter gets up to preach, then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, he's filled again with the Holy Spirit. And go to the end of the chapter to verse 31.

After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all, this includes Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit. And they spoke the word of God boldly.

Now you can make all the doctrines you like about Pentecost and speaking in tongues and everybody will argue one way or the other. and you can make all kinds of arguments against the second blessing.

But there's no doubt in that upper room they had a powerful encounter when they were at their lowest. And who did they meet with? They met with a God who says, I have plans for you.

[26 : 58] Plans to give you a hope and a future. And then they're told to aid in Jerusalem. And then they hear this sound like a rushing mighty winds. That you're free to make all your doctrines and to spend your life arguing about them.

But Peter is again filled with the Holy Spirit. And then in chapter 4 he's getting ready to preach. And what happens? He is again filled with the Holy Spirit.

In chapter 4 verse 31 where the place is shaken by God himself as they're praying. What happened? They're filled with the Holy Spirit.

God has plans for you. If you think you're too old tell that to Moses. You know what age Moses was at the burning bush? 80. And he got his pal to help him, Aaron.

You know what age Aaron was? 84. You have no excuse. Some of the youngest Baptists have seen in a long time.

[28 : 00] God has plans for God has plans. And can I say something to you?

Just in closing. He's not just got plans for you as an individual. He's got plans for the church. church. If you look at Acts 2 and verse 41, these are well-known.

It isn't 41. And it might be 41 because I'm in chapter 4. Let me get this. Acts 2 and 41.

Peter's preaching on the day of Pentecost. It says those who accepted his message were baptized and about 3,000 were added to their number that day.

[29 : 08] And just go down to verse 47. They were praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. and the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

And then if you go to verse 4 of chapter 4 in Acts, many who heard the message believed. And the number of men grew about to about 5,000.

One of the lessons I've learned is that just because I don't see something happening doesn't mean that something isn't happening. that God is at work and where a church remains faithful to the word and faithful in prayer, faithful in preaching, faithful in works of mercy, faithful in evangelism, God is at work.

church. The devil tries. The devil tries with all his might to get a grip of a church so that they settle for plan B or they settle for no plans at all.

Many of you will have read in the newspapers, there's 31 churches in Shetland, 31 church of Scotland, and they're going to close 21 in the next 12 months and be left with 10.

[30 : 34] And there's no doubt it looks like there's a great shrinkage going on. But there are also places where God is at work.

John and I just came back from Sweden on Friday and somebody phoned me to say that Pit and Wim, or we call it Coastline Community Church, they're going to reopen a Baptist church that are closed.

If you look in your adverts, you'll see that Coastline Community Church, just a little church. But they feel that they need a bigger push with youth, a bigger push in the community.

And the pastor, we've got a great pastor, and he works hard. And you know the congregation said, we'll pay for another pastor. We'll pay for a youth and a community pastor.

There's places where God is at work. Tonight in Viewfield Church in Dunfermline, Ray's having, I think this is Ray's first baptismal service. But it's amazing what Trevor and Ray were used to do in Lossiemouth, and going up to Lossiemouth again at the end of November, and in December.

[31 : 51] Through those men who stood at this pulpit here, God did amazing things. Through this congregation, if you go into Lossiemouth Square, have a look at their church hall.

you know, Westerhills, I know, were behind some of that. And go into their service and see the number of young people. I know that Westerhills were behind some of that.

That God is at work. We say, Lord, we'd love to see more of it here. I'd love to see more of it in Pitman. But this one thing I know is that God isn't scratching his head tonight and saying, what will I do with that crowd at Westerhills?

And the ones at Pitman are worse. What will we do with that? What I do know is that there's a devil. There's a devil who wants to trust you up like the proverbial Christmas turkey, and he just wants you to fail and to be depressed.

And it's happened right down through history. If you look at Ephesus, what did they lose? The Ephesian church lost their first love.

[33 : 07] If you look at Smyrna, what did they lose? They lost their freedom. And the devil causes persecution and imprisonment.

If you look at Pergamum, they lost their purity. They were led into idolatry and immorality. Thyatira were the same. They lost their purity.

Sardis, Sardis, they lost their life. And they were just going through the motions. Philadelphia, they lost their integrity.

Laodicea, the church that made God sick, they lost their passion. but hey, hey, there's a church here and in chapter 2 in verse 41, the Lord moves among them.

And in the last verse, 47, chapter 2 in verse 40, 47, the Lord added to their number. And chapter 4, again, the Lord adds to their number and they see the hand of God at work.

[34 : 24] Who is this God that we worship? Who is this God of the Bible? He's the God who says to you tonight as an individual, and he says to Westerhills as a church, I know the plans I have for you.

Plans to prosper you and not to harm you. Plans to give you hope and a future. I hope tonight, I really hope tonight, you're excited about tomorrow to see what God's plans are for God's people here in Westerhills and to see what God's plans are for you and for your little part of the world, for your little family, for your little life.

The God of the Bible, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, doesn't love anyone in the world more than he loves you. And like any father, he's got plans for you, for your family, for this church.

So be encouraged and be excited. I has not seen, nor ear heard, nor can the mind of man ever imagine what God has prepared for those who love him.

A lot of people apply that to eternity and it's true that I hasn't seen, nor ear heard, nor can the mind of man ever imagine what God has planned in eternity for those who love him.

[36 : 07] but let me finish by saying this. Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor can the mind of man ever imagine some of the things that God has got planned for you next week, next month, and next year.

I hope you'll give me an amen to the God who has planned. let's close and we're going to sing number 1118, there must be more than this.

And there is more than this. And there is more than this.