

Plans to Prosper?
God's Hope For Us

I) Intro

- a. Here we are, we have arrived at the final message of this series.
- b. I gotta say, it has been an experience the past month trying to juggle all the different responsibilities between work in the pool business, preparing the message here, the bible studies throughout the week, as well as just everyday life.
- c. And as I near the end, to be perfectly honest, I don't know how I have arrived here without collapsing from exhaustion.
- d. I am reminded of the story of a pastor who decided it was finally time to retire.
 - i. He explained to his congregation how he wears two hearing aides, trifocal glasses, bad knees that make him use a cane when he walks and it was just too much on him.
 - ii. He said to them, "It seems to me that the Lord is telling me it's time to retire."
 - iii. After the service, a sweet little old lady approached him and said, "Reverend, you have misinterpreted what the Lord has been saying to you. He's not telling you it's time to retire; he's telling you that if you keep going, he'll keep you patched up."
- e. How true it is. God gives us the grace and the strength to press on, if we would just follow His guidance; He will sustain us.
- f. And I know that it is only by the grace of God that I have been able to get up here each week and it is the grace of God that enables each of us to walk in His way and that is what we are going to take a look at today.
- g. I started out this series with a story of my brother and I at a convention for pool builders and how a pastor said the blessing one evening and after blessing the food, he offered a benediction of sorts quoting Jeremiah 29:11 "*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 hope and a future.*"
- h. The next day as my brother and I were out on the beach, we got to talking about life.
- i. Here we are, two guys at the beginning of our careers, seeking to get a good steady job we enjoy, that will be able to provide for us as well as our families when that time comes yet at the core, we

desire to be in the will of God and so we were talking about how the two intertwine.

- j. And here at this dinner we hear this pastor proclaim to all of these pool builders that God wants us to “prosper” and in the context of a banquet hall filled with struggling business owners, there is not a doubt in my mind he was implying God wants for us to be prosperous financially, that is the hope of God for us. So whatever you can do to become well-off financially is what you should pursue.
- k. So as my brother and I found ourselves talking about the future, what goals we have, what ambitions we want to pursue, we found ourselves discussing the question, “What is it that God wants for us? What is it that God wills for our lives? What is it that we should spend our time pursuing?”
- l. On one hand, there is a teaching out there that God wants us to be prosperous financially, such as the dinner blessing.
- m. On the other, there is this notion in other Christian circles that if you pursue a high-paying job and are prosperous financially then you’re not in God’s will. Instead you should abstain from all things material.
- n. So which is it?
- o. What does God want for us?
- p. Is it *okay* to be prosperous financially?
- q. Do financial matters even matter to God?
- r. Or really, what should we pursue in this life?
- s. Well, that is what we have been looking at in this series.
- t. We have taken this verse in Jeremiah that seems to be the springboard for all talk concerning this subject and we have examined the context to discover its intended meaning.
- u. (Draw Prophetic Telescope)
- v. We saw in the first week how God sent Jeremiah to prophesy to Israel concerning the 70 years of exile under the nation of Babylon and King Nebuchadnezzar if they continued to live in their sin.
 - i. And in the context of this verse, the “plans to prosper” were centered around the people turning their whole hearts back to God, not worshipping other idols.
 - ii. We saw the word translated in the NIV as prosper is the Hebrew word Shalom meaning “peace, welfare, well-being, unimpaired relationship with God.”
 - iii. This is at the heart of God’s hope for His people.

1. His relationship with His people is what matters to Him more than anything.
 2. He will do whatever it takes for His people to be united with Him, without sin inhibiting their relationship.
- w. Then we saw how the Babylonian Exile is a type for the future of Israel during the Tribulation, the 70th Seven of Daniel, when God sends His people into exile, disciplines them so severely that the remnant who survive turn their whole hearts back to God.
- i. God's plans for the future of Israel were and are for them to prosper, for them to be filled with peace, as they no longer have anything between them and their God.
 - ii. They will look on the one whom they have pierced and will cry out to their God and sin will enslave them no longer.
 - iii. God's hope is for them to turn their whole hearts back to Him so they may know true peace.
 - iv. This is what it means to prosper.
- x. Last week we then saw how Israel is an example for Christians in general over this entire dispensation.
- i. We know that at times we live in our sin and are unrepentant.
 - ii. But just as with Israel, God, as a loving father, disciplines us in order for us to turn around, to make us grow into mature believers.
 - iii. You see, God knows that most men will not change until the pain of their circumstances exceeds the pain of change.
 - iv. By recognizing we are aliens in the world, that we have a heavenly calling, it helps us focus on the need for repentance and the importance of walking in the way of the Lord, not according to our fleshly desires.
- y. Today, we are going to get to the root and draw out the meaning for us today, what it looks like to live out these principles.
- z. As I said at the beginning, too often we read a passage, particularly from the Old Testament and our first question is to ask how it applies to us today.
- aa. And while this is a great question to ask, the one that needs to be asked, background work must be done prior to answering this question.
- bb. Well, it is finally time to ask that question as we have set up the background so that we can get a proper answer.

II) Transition

- a. I have become affectionately known as “Uncle Judd” when in the company of my brother and sister-in-law. They do not have a child, I have no nephew or niece. Rather, I have two neph-dogs, Wrigley and Jack Murphy.
- b. These dogs come to work and sit in the back office with me all day.
- c. They nudge me to feed them breakfast or to take them outside to play ball, perhaps change their diapers, and when Jordan and Julia go out of town, well they get to stay with Uncle Judd.
- d. But I mention them because the one dog, Jack Murphy, is a Catahoolah cattle dog mixed with lab. He is a complete goofball.
- e. He is gray with black spots.
- f. When Julia first got him and as he grew up, I could not help but think of the hyenas in the lion king.
- g. There were three of them and while two were “normal” there was one, Ed, who was just goofy, always doing things that just make you laugh.
- h. Well as I was writing this message, I saw a goofy picture of Jack and the story of Simba and the lion king came to mind and I found it rather appropriate for our message this morning,, particularly with our team now fully back from Africa.
 - i. Simba was a lion born to the king Mufasa.
 - ii. As a cub, he took pride in his lineage and the fact that he would one day be king. I will spare you the singing of his popular song, “I just can’t wait to be king.”
 - iii. Well, his devious uncle plots to kill Mufasa and then blames it on Simba, causing Simba to leave his father’s kingdom.
 - iv. The story then picks up years later and we see Simba living in exile, surrounded by a new family, composed of a warthog and a meerkat, singing “Hakuna Matata”
 - v. And while Simba seems to be enjoying himself, deep down there is something inside that haunts him-his true identity.
 - vi. He knows deep down that he is destined to be king.
 - vii. And at one point, he meets a baboon named Rafiki who helps Simba see his father inside of him causing him to prepare himself so that he can take the throne, which is rightfully his.

- viii. As Rafiki is helping Simba realize who he is, that he is destined for more than living the life of a warthog, Simba hears the voice of his father tell him, "You are more than what you have become."
- ix. While he was in exile, Simba had become like a warthog or meerkat, but he is more than that.
- x. He is a lion, and not just any lion, he is the cub of 'thee' lion, the head of the pack and these words resonated with him so that he realized who he was and adjusted his life, found the courage to return and take the throne which was his.
- i. Now, you didn't come to church to hear Disney on tape, but I don't know about you, but I learn by correlating the truth with something I can relate with and as I remembered this story, I was struck with how this is a picture of us and what we are talking about today.
 - i. We are like Simba, currently in exile, and the Spirit is helping us to see who we really are, helping us see the image of God in each of us who have believed in the blood of Christ.
 - ii. We are in line to rule but we face the same option Simba did.
 - iii. We can live in exile, enjoy our time singing hakuna matata with our warthog friends or we can accept who we are and prepare ourselves to assume that role.
 - iv. But it's how we respond now, in the exile, that will determine if we are prepared to assume that position or not.
 - v. Will we deny who we are?
 - vi. Or will we embrace the purpose and plans of God our father and become that which He hopes we become?

III) The Will of God For Us

- a. So, what are we to pursue in this life?
- b. Are we to chase after a good career that pays well?
 - i. Or are we to burn our money and go into the wild and live off the land?
- c. Are we to spend our time doing things that bring us happiness or joy?
 - i. Or are we to spend all our spare time down at the soup kitchen out of moral obligation as that is what a good Christian does (or so we are told)?

- d. Well as we examine what God desires for us, what He hopes for us, there is one passage I have to go to first as He tells us how we are to spend our time on this earth in exile.
- e. I know we've looked at it before but it is a passage that clearly reveals to us the answer to this question.
- f. 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 *For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, ⁵not in lustful passion"*
 - i. The word translated will is Thelema, meaning desire, pleasure, implying of what God wishes would be done by us.
 - ii. The word translated sanctification is Hagiasmos meaning consecration which is the dedicating to a sacred purpose. Also meaning purification, the process of cleansing oneself of any impurities. Carries the connotation of becoming holy.
 - iii. And as I have mentioned before, I find it intriguing that the words following the statement that God wills for us to be sanctified, we are told to abstain from sexual immorality, to live with honor and not in lustful passion.
 - 1. I can't help but be drawn to the picture of marriage in Scripture and how if we have the proper view in place, we who are believers are betrothed to Christ
 - a. and if we indeed suffer with Him, as Romans 8 tells us,
 - b. if we deny our flesh and live by the Spirit,
 - c. we will be co-heirs with Him.
 - 2. But with this mindset in place, any sin we commit is in essence sexual immorality as we are defiling our bodies rather than keeping them pure and spotless for our future spouse, Christ.
- g. So, from this verse we see that it is God's desire for us to be purified, to be conformed to the image of Christ as we abstain from sexual immorality, as we put our fleshly desires to death and live by the Spirit.
- h. Now, this verse does not mention anything concerning where we should live, what job we should have, what ambitions we should pursue in this life.
- i. The reason being, God doesn't care about that so much as He cares about how those things affect our sanctification.

- j. You see, just because you live in America doesn't mean you are exempt from temptation.
- k. A CEO of a fortune 500 company faces temptation just as much as someone who holds a sign on the street-corner advertising for some business.
 - i. One makes 7 figures a year, the other makes \$7 an hour.
 - ii. Whether you are financially well-off or not is not going to change what God expects of you.
 - iii. It may change ways He expects you to support the body, with the different roles and responsibilities that accompany one's fortune or lack there of.
 - 1. If you are prosperous financially, he tells us to be generous with what we have been given, not to hoard it for ourselves.
 - 2. But in the same sense, if finances are tight or not as ample, God tells us to use whatever gift He has given us be it encouragement, be it showing mercy, whatever it is God has given us, we are to use and give back to Him.
- l. The reason I mention finances is because this is the area that most struggle with, or question.
- m. Is it "okay" if we are prosperous financially? Or is it somehow a sin?
 - i. Money is an area that I believe God tests everyone with at some point or another.
 - ii. For some, we get too greedy and God knowing that, doesn't allow us to get some job that will make us financially wealthy, knowing that it will simply be an idol that will distract us from Him (which, isn't that what we are learning is His will for us, for our whole hearts to be turned to Him?)
 - iii. But for others, when they are given money, they give it away to help others and are generous with it, knowing that if all their money was taken away, that does not change who they are in Christ. Money is not an idol to them.
 - iv. The point is money is not the focus and should not be the focus.
 - v. What job we have or don't have should not be our focus.
 - vi. Our sanctification is the focus.
 - vii. This is what God is concerned with.

IV) Transition

- a. Discussing money and thinking how it is typically associated with happiness, I was reminded of a quote by Blaise Pascal. He wrote: *All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. They will never take the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves.*
 - i. The pursuit of happiness is something all men pursue each day.
 - ii. We go to work or don't go to work; we buy one car over another car; we spend our time doing one thing more than another all because we pursue happiness.
 - iii. This is a law of human nature that is deep within each of us.
 - iv. And just because we are saved spiritually, does not mean we are changed inwardly.
 - v. It is the beginning of a long process.
 - vi. And God's desire is for us to allow the Spirit to change what makes us "happy"
 - vii. So the question is, what brings us happiness and is THIS in the will of God?
- b. As we see, God is not concerned if we are financially prosperous or not, as our verse in Jeremiah seems to oftentimes be used to argue that our financial status is what keeps God up at night so to speak.
- c. And this is not concerning money alone but anything material.
- d. God cares about how these material possessions affect our relationship with Him.
- e. For some, it has little affect, for others it is our noose that we commit spiritual suicide by.
- f. God does not care about our material wealth, he cares about our spiritual wealth.
- g. God does not care what job we have, where we live, what ambitions we pursue. He does not care if we spend every spare minute at the soup kitchen or if we never step foot in one SO LONG AS none of these take our focus off where it needs to be.
- h. SO LONG AS we are faithful and obedient in the roles and responsibilities He has given us.
- i. We clearly see the will of God, that which He is concerned about, is for us to be purified, made holy, consecrated.

- j. So the question is what does that look like in this life?
- k. What does it look like to live out our sanctification?

V) The Will of God Lived Out

- a. So we've dispelled the notion that God's great plans for us are to be prosperous financially.
- b. Whether we are or aren't is really just a matter of us making decisions in this life and following the consequences of those decisions.
- c. This is where God is concerned however, in the decision process.
- d. What have we seen all along the past three weeks?
- e. God is 100% concerned with His people seeking Him wholeheartedly and without any distraction.
- f. Well, the same is true for us today.
- g. God is not so much concerned with what we have materially, but who we are inwardly.
 - i. 1 Chronicles 29:17 *I know, O my God, that You try the heart and delight in uprightness...*
- h. God is concerned with our character and He will help those whose hearts are committed to him.
 - i. 2 Chronicles 16:9 *For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His.*
- i. Our daily decisions have a huge impact on who we are and affect our sanctification.
- j. And while there are numerous points I could make concerning this and numerous directions I could take this message, we are going to spend the little bit of remaining time examining briefly one passage which I think does an amazing job at capturing the heart of this issue.
- k. We are exhorted by Paul in Ephesians 5
 - i. Eph 5:1-2 *Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; ²and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.*
 1. We are to be imitators of God and to walk in love.
 2. 1 Peter 4:1-2 gives us insight into how Christ lived His life, *"Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, ²so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh*

no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.
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- a. Interesting that Christ did not live for the lusts of men/his flesh, but for the will of God.
 - b. Seems as if we too, should live for the will of God, even though that means we will suffer in the flesh, not physically but in the sense of putting our worldly desires to death, by doing so we are partaking in the sufferings of Christ.
- ii. Eph 5:3-5 *But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; ⁴and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. ⁵For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.*
- 1. What did we see in 1 Thessalonians?
 - 2. That the will of God is our sanctification, that we ABSTAIN from SEXUAL IMMORALITY.
 - 3. Here we see that those who do not abstain but rather indulge in these deeds have no inheritance in the kingdom.
 - 4. Those who are idolaters, those whose whole hearts are not turned toward God will fight with their flesh and live by their flesh and by doing so, forfeit their inheritance.
 - 5. 1 John 2:17 *The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.*
 - a. Those who do not live by their lusts, those who put away all immorality, those who do the will of God, endure the process of sanctification, it is these who will live forever.
 - b. It is these who will be co-heirs with Christ.
- iii. Eph 5:8-13 *For you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light ⁹(for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), ¹⁰trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; ¹²for it is*

disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. ¹³But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light.

1. Here we see two images that are often used and we are rather familiar with: light verse darkness and fruitful verse unfruitful.
 2. Here, in the midst of describing a man of integrity, a man who imitates God, we are told to not only not perform the unfruitful deeds of darkness (those works of sexual immorality that we just reviewed) but we are also to expose them.
 3. The light is where things are pure and holy without blemish.
 4. The light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth.
 5. This is where a man of character lives, he lives in the light.
- iv. Eph 5:15-18 *Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, ¹⁶making the most of your time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.*
1. As we know, we are in exile in this world as we look toward the heavenly city which is to come and as such, the days are evil.
 - a. Philippians 3:20 *For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.*
 2. We also see that we are to be careful how we walk, not as unwise men or foolish morons, rather as wise.
 - a. Proverbs 11:3 *The integrity of the upright will guide them, But the crookedness of the treacherous will destroy them.*
 - b. It is those who have character, those who have integrity whose hearts are not divided but are whole heartedly seeking God who will walk with wisdom, making the most of their time, here in exile in this world.
 3. One's character is of utmost importance.

4. Will you compromise your faith and be divided between the things of this world and the things of God?
5. The conduct of a man will never outperform the content of his character, because conduct is an expression of character.
6. Unfortunately we think that just because we have been saved spiritually the fight is over.
7. This is not the case, the fight has just begun.
8. We are to battle to be men and women of character, who walk in integrity.
9. Our feet will only walk where our heart leads.
10. If our hearts are following our flesh, well that is where our feet will take us.
11. But if our hearts are filled with the Spirit, our feet will keep us on that narrow path that leads to righteousness.

VI) Conclusion

- a. You may have deduced that I am not a big believer in the notion that God has one path for you in this life to take.
- b. I believe He knows what path you will take, but the choice is yours.
- c. You can choose where you work, who you marry, where you live.
- d. There is no problem in pursuing your dreams, as long as you don't compromise your character and are faithful in your roles and responsibilities.
- e. Just ask yourself if you pursuing that dream will help you turn closer to God and aide you in the process of sanctification or will it be a distraction and cause you to drift further from God and what His will is for your life: your sanctification.
- f. As we end this series, I hope it is evident that God loves us more than anything and has our best interest at heart.
 - i. His desire for each of us is to be at peace and have an unimpaired relationship with Him and we know that this will ultimately take place during the 7th day when those whose hearts have been turned toward God and not divided with the world will reign with Christ as co-heirs.
 - ii. That is the hope of God for each of us here today.
- g. God is telling each of us, just as Mufasa told Simba, "You are more than what you have become"
 - i. We are in exile in this world.

- ii. We are in a battle between our flesh and the Spirit but God's desire is for us to be sanctified, to humble ourselves and put our flesh to death daily.
 - iii. The question is are we acting like less than we truly are?
 - iv. Are we deep down more than what we've become?
 - v. Have we become so entangled with the world and focused on the things of this world that we are failing to live up to the level of character God has called us?
 - vi. If so, it's ok, now is the time to realize that.
 - vii. Now is the time to deal with our sin and unrepentant hearts.
 - viii. As we examined last week, God is faithful and just to forgive us if we simply confess and it is a lie of Satan to make us feel like that is not enough or to get us to doubt the Word of God as we have a pity party in our shame thinking that will impress God.
 - ix. Confess to Him, and you will be forgiven.
 - x. Repent, change your actions and pray for perseverance as you endure the process of sanctification.
 - xi. This is what God wants from us.
 - xii. The dedication of His children to pursue a righteous life knowing what is at stake, that is His hope for us.
- h. So, will you heed the warning?
 - i. Will you lose your life now so you may gain it later?
 - j. Will you press on toward the goal which you have been called, the goal which is obtained by those who pursue the will of God, which is our sanctification?
 - k. I pray we will.
 - l. Happiness, as each of us seek it daily, is not found in the feelings of satisfying one's flesh with material possessions rather it is found in feelings of right living, taking joy in being a person of character, a man after God's own heart.
 - m. I went to end by encouraging each of us with the words found in Philippians 1:6 *For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.*