

DOES GOD EVER HAVE A PLAN FOR YOU!

“The best laid plans of mice and men often go astray.” How true that phrase is! Do you know where it comes from? Robert Burns was a poet and a farmer who wrote these words in a poem called “To a Mouse.” The idea to write the poem came to him one day after he had plowed a field and happened to plow over a mouse nest and destroyed it. He thought about what he had done to that mouse and wrote a poem about it that contained these words. “But mouse you are not alone, in proving foresight may be vain; the best laid plans of mice and men often go askew and leaves us nothing but grief and pain, for promised joy.” Thus the phrase was born. Think back to times in your lives when you have made plans but then something happened and those plans went out the window, usually bringing disappointment and grief instead of promised joy.

God told the Israelites that he had a plan for them that they could look forward to, a plan that would give them hope; a plan they could have complete confidence in because his plans never fail. The plan he had for the Israelites is basically the same plan he has for us. So my friends, get excited! Why? **Does God Ever Have a Plan For You!** His plan includes not dwelling on the past. His plan includes praise for his holy name.

Imagine for a moment that terrorists invaded Columbus, burned down your homes, our beautiful church and destroyed all the buildings in our city! After doing that, they then hauled us off as captives in their homeland. Wouldn't that be awful? That's basically what happened to the Israelites in 586 B.C. when the Babylonians came and destroyed Jerusalem and the beautiful temple Solomon had built. The survivors were marched off as captives in Babylon. As bad as that was, they deserved much worse treatment than that. God should have marched them off to hell for continuing to treat him like dirt by their persecution of his prophets, their idolatry and immorality, their lack of love toward others, their selfishness and corruption. Yet, even in Babylon, God would not abandon his people. Listen to what Isaiah writes. **This is what the Lord says- he who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters, who drew out the chariots and horses, the army and reinforcements together, and they lay there, never to rise again, extinguished, snuffed out like a wick.** God knew they would reminisce and long for the days when God had opened a path through the Red Sea to lead them over to safety; how he conquered all their enemies in the Promised Land. Who could forget the stories of the wall of Jericho falling down! Yet, God didn't want them to think about those things. Listen to what He says to them! **Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?** God wanted his people to forget the past and to look ahead because there was hope. In a way God was saying to them. “You think what I did in the past was awesome. You ain't seen nothin' yet. The best is yet to come.” God had a rescue mission up his sleeve. His plan was to have a number of them resettle in Jerusalem in 70 years and rebuild the temple. Jerusalem would once again be the hub and center of their worship life. From this remnant the promised deliverer would come to free them from the slavery of sin and death.

Why would God have this plan for them? Was it because they were going to become such good people and were going to turn over a new leaf? Was it because they would turn into model Christians? No! They failed miserably again and again as God told them in our text. **Yet you have not called upon me, O Jacob, you have not wearied yourselves for me, O Israel. You have not brought me sheep for burnt offerings, nor honored me with your sacrifices. I have not burdened you with grain offerings nor wearied you with demands for incense. You have not bought any fragrant calamus for me, or lavished on me the fat of your sacrifices.**

But you have burdened me with your sins and wearied me with your offenses. Their history was filled with pages and pages of sinful thoughts, words and actions. God summarized it when he said, **You have burdened me with your sins.** A better translation of this phrase would be, *“you have forced me into labor with your sins.”* In other words, their sins forced God into action. If God wanted them to be in heaven; if God wanted their sins to be forgiven, he had to do all the work. He had to have the plan and carry it out. Boy, did he ever have a plan for us! God the Son would leave his throne in heaven, be conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary and then be born in the city of Bethlehem. He would live among sinful people, put up with the ridicule, hatred and persecution of his own people. He would humbly submit to his Father’s will by allowing himself to be arrested, beaten, whipped, condemned by Pontius Pilate and nailed to a cross. On top of that, as if this were not enough, he would submit himself to his Father’s anger for sins he never committed as he experienced the pain of hell and cried out, **My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?** Jesus carried out his Father’s plan perfectly. His resurrection from the dead proved that. Because of his plan, God could say to these people, **I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.** God blots out their sins not because of anything they had done but for his own sake. In other words, God chose to send his Son and forgive them because in his grace, he wanted to. It’s as simple as that.

My friends, the plan God had for the Israelites is the same plan he has for us. We can breathe a sigh of relief because to be honest, we are no different from the Israelites. They were guilty of idolatry and so are we. We don’t always fear, love and trust in God above all things. They were guilty of immorality. How often haven’t we been guilty of sinful sexual thoughts, words or actions? They ignored God’s Word so that they could do their own thing. How often don’t we do the same? They were ungrateful and complained to God constantly no matter what he did for them or how good he had been to them. Doesn’t that sound like us? I could go on and on but just like the Israelites, our history of sin would fill volumes and volumes. We know that the Lord in his justice should separate himself from us and march us straight to hell.

But that’s not his plan for us. In his mercy, instead of saying, “Since you continue to sin against me and treat me horribly, I am going to wipe you off the face of this earth,” he says, “I am going to wipe your sins off the face of this earth and remember them no more.” Just think of that. We were covered from head to toe, inside and out, with the filthy stain of sin that we could never remove or blot out. God comes to us with the only stain remover that really works, the cleansing blood that Jesus shed on the cross. That means when we stand before God on Judgment Day, we don’t have to worry that God will remind us of our sin and say, “Remember when you did this! Remember when you said that.” Because of Jesus, he remembers our sins no more. Because of that, God wants us to look ahead because the best is yet to come. Paul spoke of that in our second reading when he wrote, **forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.**

What a plan God had for the Israelites! Yet he was not done. God’s plan for the Israelites included something else. Isaiah writes, **that they may proclaim my praise.** When God delivered them from their captivity in Babylon and reminded them of the Messiah who was to come, his faithful people would respond with words and acts of praise. They would rebuild the temple and regularly gather there to hear his Word. They would sing praises to him and offer sacrifices of love and thanks. They would be the kind of people that Peter spoke about in his first letter. **You are a chosen people, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.**

The same is true for us. God's plan for us was not only to forgive and save us, but also to work in us the desire and strength to proclaim his praise. We praise him by making him number one in our lives and regularly gathering together in church to hear his Word and receive the Sacrament. We praise him when we take the time to attend Bible study or read our Bibles at home or have family devotions. We praise him when we encourage one another and use our mouths to build each other up. We praise God when we show kindness and compassion toward those around us. We praise him when we use all that He has given us to enhance the Gospel ministry here and throughout the world. We praise God when we tell family, friends and neighbors of their need for forgiveness and then point them to Jesus who won their forgiveness. To summarize, we praise God when we love him with all our heart, soul, strength and mind and when we love our neighbor as ourselves.

“The best laid plans of mice and men.” My friends, how true that phrase is! How often don't we make plans with good intentions, but sometimes our plans fail! God's plan never fails and does God ever have a plan for you and me! His plan includes not dwelling on our past but rather, focusing on our future, a future filled with his blessings here on earth and his blessing of eternal life in heaven all because Jesus lived and died to blot out all our sins. How amazing that really is! His plan also includes praise to his holy name that comes from hearts filled with thanks for his abundant grace. My friends, this is a plan we can truly be excited about, a plan we need to take to heart, a plan God wants us to share with others. Let's do just that. Amen.