

## "What Do We Expect?"

7.Mar.10

(*The Easter Experience*, Session 4, "Your Life Has a Plan")

Jeremiah 29:11

Every now and then many of us step back and take a look at our life. We think about how we got where we are. We might even compare our life to someone else's, or wonder if we will ever reach that one illusive goal we planned for ourselves. We perhaps wonder whether or not the path we travel is indeed the right one, or why some of our expectations were fulfilled and others not. Then there are some of us who still wonder what it is we search for and whether or not we have it already but have just forgotten we have it.

Story: The legendary publishing magnate Randolph Hurst was master of a huge empire which included the famous Hurst Castle in San Simeon, California and a massive collection of paintings, statuary, furniture, and all manner of "stuff." His appetite was insatiable. The estate warehouses are still full with thousands of pieces he acquired. His biographers write about one occasion when he found himself searching for a particular painting—a painting that was to be *the* art piece to complete his collections. Mr. Hurst sent out several assistants throughout the world to search for it. To his regret, it was never located. Several months after the end of the search, one of the maintenance employees managed to get a meeting with Mr. Hurst and told him he had located the painting. Turns out, Mr. Hurst had it all along...hidden among the mass of things stored in one of the warehouses!

Curiously, Mr. Hurst had been searching everywhere for something he already had but forgot he had it. It might have been the same with the Hebrews in Babylon. They had lost everything... or so they thought. Though they had what they needed all along, they seemed to have forgotten they had it. On occasion, it might be the same with us. We search through life for some *thing* we just know will be "the thing" for us, and we hope and expect to eventually find it. Yet all along, seemingly unaware, we already have it. We just forget we

have it. What was that *thing* for the exiled Hebrews? I suggest it was *trust* in God.

Many of you know I often "fly by the seat of my pants"—sometimes intentionally, other times by mistake! But in the main, I hope and expect myself to know where I am, how I got here, where I am going, and what will most likely happen when I get there. *This is my expectation*. Yet I am well aware that "my" plans may not be God's plans for me.

Some of us do not expect nor welcome changes to our plan unless those changes are within the lines we ourselves have drawn. In other words, "Yes, you can help me color in my life's plan, but only if you never go outside *my* lines." But unlike us, God knows no lines. The Book of Proverbs reminds us, "The human mind plans the way, but the LORD directs the steps." (16:9)

Apparently the Hebrews had forgotten, or had made the decision to not let God work God's plan. So they found themselves in exile. Suddenly they faced a tremendously bleak situation. Their expectation was what was told them—captivity. They were in exile in Babylon. Jerusalem was ransacked. The holy Temple destroyed. They had lost their "home," their land, their future, their independence, and perhaps even their livelihood. Nonetheless, their exile was their own fault. Their only expectation was to linger there with little or no future. *God's* expectation, on the other hand, was something else. Jeremiah tells them God is not looking to their past but to their future. God sees beyond their current circumstances when they are unable to do so, just as God saw beyond the circumstances of Christ's passion when Christ's disciples and closest friends were unable to do to. God can do that sort of thing when we *cannot* or *will not*.

Let's back up just a bit. The Hebrews had given up listening to God and went about trying to fulfill their own plans. (*Jer. 25*) At the announcement of God's retribution the Jewish leaders try to kill the messenger (in this instance, Jeremiah) for having spoken horrible words of desolation. (*Jer 27*) As you can imagine, the Hebrews didn't much care for this particular plan of God's. It was not what they

expected. It was not their plan. So they gathered prophets who would tell them a plan they wanted to hear—pleasant, happy things.

One of these prophets was Hananiah, who actually turned out to be a false prophet. Hananiah and Jeremiah went at it. (*Jer. 28*) And poor Jeremiah! He was more or less alone. The people preferred the pleasant promises Hananiah spoke—supposedly God's promises of prosperity and peace and safety; quite a contrast to Jeremiah's honest yet sober message from God.

Hananiah was a popular showman. Or so it would seem to me. Lots of "bling," "pizzazz," and "bells and whistles"! So naturally Hananiah and Jeremiah were constantly at each other's throat, even in front of the religious leaders. Though a patient and tenacious prophet, Jeremiah finally reaches the point where he has had enough of Hananiah and lashes out at him. (*28:15*) "Listen, Hananiah, God has not sent you, and you have made these people trust in a lie. Therefore God says, 'I am going to send you off the face of the earth. Within this year you will be dead, because you have spoken rebellion against God.'" (*adpt.*) And he was.

God's plan is for the people to take heart and look toward a future of restoration. God *expects* them to be productive in life and faith, even in Babylon; to carry on with their lives, because rescue will come to them. God tells them unequivocally,

"For surely I know the plans I have for you...  
...plans for your welfare and not for harm,  
to give you a future with hope."

God's expectation is that they live normal lives in Babylon, overcome inconveniences, bless others, be peace-makers, be patient and resilient, and *trust* God. Their expectation is to surrender hope and just endure. God's plan is for them to settle down and wait on God. Their plan is to be inconsolable.

In the Bible Study this morning we were reminded that Mary's expectations for Jesus were very different than God's. So it seems evident that God's expectations often differ from ours. **Yet, we are wise to remember that God is God, and we are not!** When you

and I come to a signpost, or a crossroads, or a fork in our road, and we think we should go one way, God may actually expect us to go the other way. Someone once said, "We can make all the plans we want, but God has God's plans, too, and God just does not feel the need to check-in with us."

In the video earlier this morning the speaker briefly mentioned this "GPS" thing that is now in many cars and trucks. I do not have one in my car. Indeed, I have no experience with a "GPS." Yet his comment got me to thinking. So I did some research on this "GPS" thing. GPS stands for "Global Positioning System." In brief, it is a widely used aid to navigation, helping one know where one is going and how to best get there. It sort of lays out a map or a plan for us and sticks with us until we get there. Basically, it is a "tracking system" monitoring the movements of the vehicle for safety and accuracy.

I cannot help but think that sometimes I wish I had a "GPS" for my *life* and for my *faith*. It would aid my navigation. It would take the plan I punch in, follow it, and make sure I get there safely. This "GPS for my life" would get me to where "I" want to go; where "I" *expect* to go. But I would have to change one word in the name. I would keep those three letters—G P S. However, I would name it my "*God* Positioning System." Only thing is, I suspect God would sometimes change my direction.

Margaret Mitchell wrote the book "Gone with the Wind." She also wrote this...

"Life is under no obligation to give us what we expect."

I guess we could say the same thing about God.

"*God* is under no obligation to give us what we expect."

Our job is to trust God no matter what our personal plans or expectations. I would like to be able to place my full trust in a doctor, or a pharmacist, or an insurance company, or the IRS, or a government, or a denominational office, or a friend, or a clergy associate. I do my very best to do that...even if at times I do it with

some reservations. But I have *no* reservations putting my trust in God! Whatever the expectation, God is God, and I am not.

THAT is our greatest hope and greatest consolation in all of life—expecting only that God do what God deems best for my life.