ACOF – The Promises of God **August 24, 2025**

Sermon: The Promises of Purpose and Abundant Life

Last week, I mentioned the planning and great care that God took in providing everything living creatures would need to thrive in creation, even providing a safe space, the Garden of Eden, for humanity to explore, as humanity learned to care for this world as our Father does. Therefore, it is no stretch to claim that the one who made us knows our needs better than we do. But this truth is also supported by Scripture. Consider Matthew 6:7-8, where Jesus, when his followers asked him to teach them how to pray, prefaced his teaching by saying this:

> **7** *"When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard because of their many words.* **8** *Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."*

Shortly after teaching his followers how to pray, he also told them, in Matthew 6:31-33,

> **31** *Do not worry, saying,* 'What will we eat?' *or* 'What will we drink?' *or* 'What will we wear?' **32** *For it is the gentiles who seek all these things, and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.* **33** *But* ***seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness****, and* ***all these things will be given to you as well****.* (condition/promise)

Truly, God has demonstrated throughout Scripture that he sees to the needs of those who follow him. Whereas Jesus pronounced blessings upon those who follow the heart of God's teachings, in Old Testament times God spoke to his people through prophets, such as the prophet Jeremiah, to offer words of hope. We shall look at several passages from the book of Jeremiah, setting the stage for our word of hope from the Lord, that God promises us not only that we are claimed as his own, but that we have a purpose within God's kingdom on earth.

This was obvious to Adam and Eve, for they were fashioned by God's own hands – they knew no earthly parents. **Of course** they belonged to God… And God gave them a purpose from the very beginning: Beyond telling them to be fruitful and multiply, he gave them stewardship of creation.

And they were fruitful, giving rise to *generations* of offspring. Eventually, God chose one of their descendants, Abraham, and his wife Sarah, to bring forth *an entire people* to worship and follow the Lord. From their line he fashioned *the people of Israel*, who were taught to worship God alone. It was to this people, hundreds of years later, that Jeremiah spoke, at a time when they had strayed from following God and faced dire consequences for that choice. They had been carried into exile and lived as a conquered people, as slaves once again in a foreign land. Yet God had not strayed from them. God is steadfast. So, he sent his prophet, Jeremiah, to speak to them words of both correction and hope. In Jeremiah chapter 7 we hear his words of reproof and correction:

> **22** in the day that I brought your ancestors out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to them or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. **23** But this command I gave them, *"Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people; walk only in the way that I command you, so that it may be well with you."* **24** Yet they did *not* obey or incline their ear, but, in the stubbornness of their evil will, they walked in their own counsels and looked backward rather than forward. **25** From the day that your ancestors came out of the

land of Egypt until this day, I have persistently sent all my servants the prophets to them, day after day, **26** yet they did not listen to me or pay attention, but they stiffened their necks. They did worse than their ancestors did.

But in Jeremiah chapter 24 (1a, 3-7) we hear how God revealed his new word of promise to this people in their exile:

> **1a** The LORD showed me two baskets of figs placed before the temple of the LORD… **3** And the LORD said to me, *"What do you see, Jeremiah?"* I said, *"Figs—the good figs very good and the bad figs very bad, so bad that they cannot be eaten."*
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> **4** Then the word of the LORD came to me: **5** Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Like these good figs, so I will regard as good the exiles from Judah whom I have sent away from this place to the land of the Chaldeans. **6** I will set my eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them up and not tear them down; I will plant them and not pluck them up. **7** I will give them a heart to know that I am the LORD, and **they will be my people, and I will be their God**, for they will return to me with their whole heart.

What words of hope! God affirmed that he still claims them as his own, even though they strayed from him so far that their lives turned bleak. God speaks with such surety about his people, saying "They WILL return to me with their whole heart…" What a joy to be claimed as God's own people because they chose to follow God with their whole heart.

At this point, you should be asking yourself: *But, does this apply to us?* After all, it was spoken by Jeremiah to God's people in exile. To assume it applies to us (without further Scriptures indicating that it does) would be wrong. However, we can be sure these words of hope apply to us too, in this particular case. Looking to the New Testament, we hear God's appointed apostle, Paul, speaking similar words to the followers of Christ in his 2nd letter to the Church in Corinth, saying in 2 Corinthians 6:16,

> **16** What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God, as God said, *"I will live in them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."*

While the people of Israel were claimed as God's chosen people throughout the Old Testament, the followers of Christ have also been claimed by God, who lived and walked among us in Jesus Christ, for a time. And even now God's Spirit lives within us, abiding with us!

Thus, throughout time, since creation's beginning, God has claimed all who would follow him, who would walk according to his will, as his own. We are spoken of as God's children again and again in Scripture, as adopted, as heirs of the promise. So what, exactly, does God promise to his people?

In Jeremiah 29:11-14a God says to his people in exile:

> **11** Surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. **12** Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. **13** When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, **14** I will let you find me, says the LORD…"

So, although these words were spoken specifically to the Israelites in exile, it is not wrong to claim God has plans for us, for OUR welfare, for a future with hope, as it says in Jeremiah 29:11. This is a time when such a passage bears witness to a truth about our God – that God continues to care for us, even when our actions and the actions of those around us have put us in bad places, brought about circumstances that remove our freedoms, making it difficult to worship God openly and live our faith. Most of us, perhaps all of us here today, have no idea what it is to live in exile. But we have experienced hardships, whether as a result of turning away from God and committing actions that go against our faith or because of the actions of the powerful who exercise control over our lives. **This specific promise of God to the Israelites, to God's chosen people, can bring us hope because we live now as the body of Christ, as the people of God in this day and age.** And as we are told in Hebrews 13:8,

> *"Jesus Christ [God Incarnate] is the same yesterday and today and forever."*

So, claiming this promise does not involve any twisting of meaning, nor mixing of our culture with this promise to make it say something we want it to say that it just does not say. The Spirit abiding within us bears witness to the truth of this statement for those who follow God in any age. Also, such an interpretation does not go against its original one, and it does agree with many of the other Scriptures from throughout the Old and New Testaments. It does not stand alone in stating God has plans for his people, plans that are good because God is good…and therefore the root of all goodness.

Besides, as Galatians tells us in chapter 3:

> **26** In Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. **27** As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. **28** There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. **29** And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

Therefore, the promises that God has given to Abraham and to his line, the people of Israel, also apply to us if we belong to Christ.

To belong to Christ is to seek to live and love as he did, valuing God the Father above all else and placing the welfare of all people just as high as we do our own. That is what it is to live in the kingdom of God on earth, in this life.

Doing this, caring for others, we will not seek to amass wealth, although it is true that God may so prosper our actions that earthly riches come to us, so that we can do even more good for our neighbors. This is not a prosperity gospel, not as it continues to be preached by so many today. The prosperity that God promises has to do with amassing treasures in heaven, not on earth. God may give us earthly wealth, but only to empower us to further live into our calling to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ.

Recall that Matthew 6:33 told us to seek first God's kingdom, to seek the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and promises that then all we need to feed, clothe, and house our families will be provided, for God knows what we need.

Seeking first the kingdom of God, the righteousness of Christ, will cause us to redefine our "needs" whenever the world (in its foolish wisdom) would tell us we NEED that new car, or the latest technology, the latest styles of clothing, that new bedroom set, or to dine at a new chic restaurant that charges $40 per plate. These are often not needs, although they may be desires. I'm not saying treating ourselves occasionally to one of these is wrong, just that they are not true needs, and so not part of God's promises. I speak of this only to caution you, so that you do not let society and advertising warp your sense of what is truly needful in a life lived by faith.

We are told in Philippians 4:19 that

"God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."

God is not just worried about our needs in this life, but also our eternal life and our relationship with him. And so God came, entering the world in Jesus Christ in order to provide a way for his promises to be made manifest in this life and the next. And in John 10:10, in the good shepherd passage, Jesus Christ proclaims that he came so that we may have life and have it abundantly.

Thus, God has promised you purpose, that he will prosper you in his kingdom, and that you will live eternal life through Jesus Christ, IF you believe in him and walk according to his Way. I can think of no life more abundant than living eternally in the presence of God, which has been made possible by the righteousness of Jesus Christ – our God who came to walk among us.

To the God of all grace, who calls you to share God's eternal glory in union with Christ, be all power and glory forever.