

Carroll Chapel: September 20, 2022

Erin Newton

Everybody. We are happy to be gathered again together. Kirsten Floyd, who will be reading scripture for us before we hear from Dr. David Strong. So join us in worship together this morning.

Kirsten Floyd

This is a reading from first Timothy verses to one chapter two verses 1 to 7. I urge then first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and Thanksgiving be made for all people, for kings and all those in authority that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good and pleases God, our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus who gave Himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witness to at the proper time, and for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle. I am telling the truth. I am not lying. And a true and faithful teacher of the Gentiles.

Erin Newton

Thank you. We will now transition to hear a devotional from Dr. David Strom, Dr. Strawn is the professor of the Doctorate of Ministry Program. He also taught my principles of teaching class at the master's level. He's actually taught at five different higher education institutions. He's led multiple churches in their education ministries, administration. He is a distinguished fellow here at Carol, and he's currently on the board of governors.

So Dr. Strawn is a joy to hear from you today. And we are looking forward to it.

David Strawn

Well, thank you, Aaron. It's a great privilege to have this opportunity to share this time with you. When she asked me to do this a couple of weeks ago, I said, sure, I'd love to do it. And subsequently, the allergy season has attacked me. And so I'm kind of scratchy this morning. I hope it won't be too unpleasant to listen to.

But I want to start off with a little story, a story about a rather large family in which a young child was always given special treatment. They always got the most positive attention at the event, got the best gifts on the holiday, didn't have to do all the chores you had to do. And by now, those of us who are the older siblings are putting a name to that person.

You know, it's Janet or whoever. We remember with frustration that list and happy feeling we had. I'm sure I'm right here. Well, the aggravation with the favoritism got so bad that the older siblings decided to take matters into their own hands. One day they were all away from the house and they grabbed little brother and they were going to get rid of him and then throw the blame on some terrible accident.

But before they could believe their plans, a better solution presented itself. Some foreigners came by and offered to take a little brother off of your hand for a little bit of cash here, and we've got some things we can do with him. Well, the older sibling story of Poppa remained the same. Little brother was gone and her hands were clean, but they had money.

Sounds like a good deal to me. Decades later, however, the tables were turned. Now, a little brother was all grown up and had somehow moved into a very powerful position, and they stood before him begging for help. He could squash them with impunity for their evil treatment. But the remarkable thing is he didn't do that. Rather, he explained that all the evils they had intended toward him, God had used to bring him to a place where they could where he could be their benefactor.

By now, you've probably figured out that I was telling the story of Joseph and his brothers. I mean, it's kind of hard to come up with. It's just a number of one of the number of times where God used bad stances to bring out a positive outcome. I was thinking through this and almost a 28 or popped into my head.

We know that for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who call according to his purpose. It's a promise that ultimately nothing is too bad or too evil or too hard for God to redeem for his good purposes. Our devotion this morning is actually taken from Luke Jeremiah, however, early in Jeremiah's prophetic ministry.

He warned the people of God that God had revealed to him that his patience was about exhausted, that if they didn't change their ways, if they didn't repent from their seeing, God was going to inflict punishment on it. They just ignored him as usual and went on doing the evil things that they had been doing for decades. For centuries, to his word, not allowed the

Babylonians to invade their land and captured their whole city, Jerusalem, destroy the temple, take the people into captivity in Babylon.

And as you might guess, the Hebrews in exile in Babylon wept. And what? Well, here's this. Bad things happening to us. Oh, what is so terrible? As if they hadn't been warned. God's people carried wish their homeland into exile in a pagan city had been calling out for them to deliver them. Oh, please. We read into them 137 by the waters of Babylon.

There we sat down and wept. When we remember time on the willows, we hung up our lives for our captors, required of assault and our tormentors with mercy. Seek us one of those songs of Zion. How can we sing the songs? The Lord in a Foreign Land? They thought somehow God in a bend after ignoring centuries of his prophets, calling them to repent and live God honoring lives, he finally imposed the punishment that he had warned them was coming.

And now they found themselves captives in a foreign land. And they finally began to cry out for deliverance. However, instead of deliverance, God sent them a letter. Jeremiah wrote this letter and it didn't really have the words that they wanted to hear. Go to settle down. You're going to be there. 70 years. Build houses, plant gardens, bear children.

Raise them up. Give them in marriage. Have grandchildren. In other words, they were supposed to live as normal life as possible while they were nature. Then God told them something virtually unthinkable. They were to pray for the welfare of Babylon. They were to ask God to bless these Pagan. To trade them away from the holy city. I'm pretty sure that they would have been most happy if God would inflict plagues on the Egyptians decades before.

But God's instruction of them was to seek the welfare of the city where He sent him. Logical. Simple. If the city where you're living prosperous, you too will prosper. Now comes that most important verse that many of his claims are for. I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord plans to pray for you, not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Okay, now we get down to the. So what part of it? My favorite part of the lesson. Many years ago, I was at a very low place of my spiritual life. My ministry was consuming 50, 60 hours a week easily. And even then it was all an investment of time and energy. Not everything was going as I thought it should.

The church just was not doing all that I thought we could do and, you know, put more hours into it just and as if that wasn't enough, I had a son and a daughter, junior high, high school age kids, and I was able to work on doctoral studies. I clearly remember one day a much white time with God.

I told him, if this is what the Christian life is supposed to be like, I'm not sure I can recommend it. I was in a pretty low spot and if I didn't have enough to do, it was time for preaching camp and we didn't have enough sponsors. So if the boys were going to camp, I was going to have to be one of the sponsors, a bully.

I get to go spend a week at camp instead of doing work. It's not done. Back at the church, back in the office. So we went, you know, and we had a good time. My children, I got spent. I got to hear the all star game with Nolan Ryan pitching, you know, everything that came out of it, I guess.

But anyway, one night as the camp pastor stepped up to bring his message, he began by reading this verse. Jeremiah, 21 I live for. I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord plans to pray for you, not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. It was almost as if God was tapping me on the shoulder saying, Listen, boy, I'm talking to you.

I don't remember a thing that Pastor said after that. I spent the rest of that night with God assuring me that He's plans for me were for good and not for His plan for to give me hope and a future. Despite all of the stuff that was going on in my world, all of the hassles I was having.

His plans were for good. As soon as the worship service ended, I rushed out to the payphone, which of course, didn't have cell phones back in that day. And I called my wife Kathy and our tears. I read the verse to her and tell her how God spoke directly to me through it. We cried together, knowing that God's plans for us were good.

And I've come to understand, as I've continued my steady, that the word that comes into English is good. Right there will for Prospero is a Hebrew word. Shalom. Now, this is about time for a Hebrew lesson. I'm just. I'm just running Hebrew myself. So is often translated peace. But it is so much more than that. It is the highest expression of God's blessing on His people.

A friend of mine sent me about a 20 page monograph on the word Shalom. I'm not going to read the whole thing to here can be kind to you. Well, that was a turning point in my ministry, knowing that God's plan for plants to bless me, my plants often get messed up. You know, Robert Berks, the best laid plans of mice and men getting off big late or go off is like God's plans, however, are always for Shiloh, for peace, for hope, for good.

As I said, this verse has been a touch point. My ministry many times. Sometimes it's been a life changing events, and sometimes it's just been everyday occurrences. Let me give you a couple examples in this. In 1995, I began conversation with First Baptist Church, College Station, concerning possibly joining the staff as an associate pastor, focusing on education and discipleship at the time of serving in a church in another city had a good ministry going there.

The people were feeling good about what we were doing. God was blessing. We were having good results. A new pastor, senior pastor, came to the church and and he was eager for me to stay. He assured me that he want to be to partner with him and that we're the church. But I promised to come to College Station and at least meet with the people here.

And so I did. We talked and we visited and whatever. But that Sunday morning, I walked into worship at First Baptist. The pastor at the time, Dr. Malcolm Lane, stepped up to it and it read

text for the morning. He opened his Bible to Jeremiah 29:11 and began to read for I know the plans I have for you, plans to pray for you, to give you hope, not plans to harm you, throw you, open a future.

I looked at Kathie's little time store packet. It's it's God has clearly said this is the place I want you and that was just one of several big events in my life that have been affirmed with this very passage. Now, at the other end of the scale, a few weeks ago, I was out on my patio for my morning time with God.

I sit out there with my little prayer devotional book here that I keep taking notes here and I'm reflecting on the direction of my maturity for this small church. And I'm trying to help right now. I've been walking through the book of Philippians, and it was clear that we were getting to the end of that and I needed something the world was going to go.

So I was just kind of rummaging through her mind, What are some things we might do? And I remembered that years ago I did a special study on Epistle to John. Decades ago, when I was in my second year Greek. That was I translated John's epistles. That was my second year Greek was it translated? And it was it stuck with me ever since.

So I just made a note in the Journal suggesting maybe this is how I should proceed. Then I looked at the bottom of the page and at the bottom of the page it said, Pride of the place I have you at that moment. I do exactly what God wants me to do to bring to that church. Those are just a couple of times that God has used a special verse in my life to point me in the way you want me to go.

Now, I don't know what passage God's going to have for you to use. I don't have a way of knowing, but what he wants you to say to you. But I do know that his word contains the truth that he wants you to understand. And the chances are, if you will give him opportunity, he's going to give you a passage that's going to speak to you, and it will guide you as you try to serve him to the rest of your ministry.

And so my encouragement for you today is to spend a little time with God asking him to reveal himself to you. And what is the verse? What is the passage that you want me to know that that's going to give me that assurance of hope in a future? Thanks for letting me come share this with you. It's been a great privilege and opportunity.

Thank you.

Erin Newton

Thank you. Dr. Strong. That word that God's plans are always to bring shalom. I'm going to be thinking on that for a while today.

