

## **“GOD MAKES HIS PROMISES GOOD!”**

by Rom A. Pegram (10/2/16)

Who alone knows the future? Did you know this? *We're all blind from this moment on.* The fact is, you don't know where you'll be 5 minutes from now (and I don't know where I'll be)! For certain, not a one of us knows where we'll be 24 hours from now. For God alone knows the future ... and that's why we need to stay in touch with God ... constantly...

Today, I'm beginning a *short* series of messages that will take us through November. The series is entitled “How to Get Through the Bad Days: Insights from Jesus' Good Friday Conversations.” No, it's *not* Holy Week. But, why do we have to wait for a certain time of the year to take a look at something so relevant? I mean, do you just have bad days during certain times of the year? Of course not! So, as we approach the subject of ‘getting through the bad days,’ we're simply going to look to what was perhaps the worst day in Jesus' human life ... to learn to get through similar days in our life. After all, as Christians, Jesus is supposed to be our example of *how to* live the lives we've been given. So, we're going to look to Good Friday, as it's come to be known, in order to find out how to move through *our* bad days in life as well...

And, did you know this? God, being the only One who knows the future, knows *when* we're going to go through the bad days of our lives, too ... and *GOD HAS PLANS FOR OUR BAD DAYS AS WELL!* Did you know that? Our bad days may be ... days of overwhelming crisis or tragedy ... or maybe not so serious, but ‘bad days’ just the same. The question is, what are God's plans for *those* days? What are God's plans for you, when you feel like ‘this day will never end?’ We're going to find out in the weeks to come...

This morning, I want to look at our scripture lesson very carefully ... so that you will *know* that God does have plans for our bad days, too. You see, this morning God will be speaking to us through the prophet Jeremiah ... as he shares God's word with a group of exiles who were having *several* bad days ... and with us, who may be going through some ourselves. Listen now, as we hear from the prophet, Jeremiah (29:11-14, TEV)...

‘... I alone know the plans I have for you, plans to bring you prosperity and not disaster, plans to bring about the future you hope for. {12} Then you will call to me. You will come and pray to me, and I will answer you. {13} You will seek me, and you will find me because you will seek me with all your heart. {14} Yes, I say, you will find me, and I will restore you to your land. I will gather you from every country and from every place to which I have scattered you, and I will bring you back to the land from which I had sent you away into exile. I, the Lord, have spoken’.

“I, the Lord, have spoken.” ‘About what? Folks, here is a promise of God—through Jeremiah—that's letting God's people know (who had just begun their ‘bad days’) that God is a God who loves them ... and whose promises (we find later) come true. And, this is for us, too! *Here's the first thing Jeremiah teaches us...*

**IN THE MIDST OF OUR BAD DAYS, GOD PLANS PROSPERITY FOR US.** Verse 11 tell us, once again: “I alone know the plans I have for you, plans to bring you prosperity and *not* disaster, plans to bring about the future *you* hope for.” Isn’t this comforting, especially after times of national disaster or tragedy in our lives—like what happened several years ago on September 11, 2001? You remember what our terrorist enemies were aiming for! The largest target they hit was the center of the Western World’s financial existence ... or so Bin Laden thought...

What Bin Laden didn’t count on were those of us who *don’t* necessarily put our faith in Western economy first! What Bin Laden didn’t count on were the thousands of people in this country who still believe the promises of God which say, “I ... know the ... plans to bring you prosperity and *not* disaster.” Do you think those exiles on their way to Babylon were in any better shape than we were, as a nation, on September 12<sup>th</sup>? No!

Folks, the GOOD NEWS for us this morning is that *God’s plans for us don’t depend on the U.S. economy!* God’s plans can even operate during our ‘bad days.’ Do you believe the promises of God? God’s word also tells us through the Apostle Paul...

- Romans 8:28, NIV – “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” And *ALL THINGS includes our ‘bad days’...*
- Philippians 4:19, NIV – “And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.” *Isn’t it good to know that our needs are going to be met—no matter what kind of a day we’re having—by a God whose ‘riches’ are not dependent on world economy ... or the U.S. economy? The banks of heaven are what we can count on for our needs!*

Also, from Jeremiah we learn ... **IN THE MIDST OF OUR BAD DAYS, IT’S GOD’S VISION THAT COUNTS!** Maybe ‘bad days’ could also be called ‘uncertain days’—days when *change* seems to be ‘the name of the game’ and nothing seems to be happening like it used to! I don’t know why we get all ‘bent out of shape’ when changes come up in life (even in the Church), but the fact is *we do*; the reason I don’t know *why* we do comes from my study of God’s relationship to his people all throughout history. Perhaps God doesn’t want us to make ‘idols’ of all that we ‘get used to’...

Barbara Moorman, in an article for Christianity Today (Vol. 35, No. 12), said this: “It’s curious to realize that people like you and me, who set such store by being settled and secure, should worship a God whose revelation was to nomads and wanderers. We try to domesticate God, try to get God to settle down with *us*—but never succeed.”

It seems that it’s been during times of ‘uncertain days’—when change was prevalent, that God has done some of his best work! Maybe it’s when we’re forced out of our ‘comfort zones’ that God then has our attention enough to share his will with us! Did you ever think of that? But, here’s what we need to remember during those days—even here at *our* church: in the midst of our bad or ‘uncertain’ days, it’s God’s vision that

counts! And, folks, God's vision is *never* in the past; it's *always* ahead ... beckoning us to follow. This is what God was saying to those exiles headed for Babylon! And God shared his vision with his people in these ways...

- V. 12 – You're going to call to me ... and I'm going to be there to answer.  
*You can count on that!*
- V. 13 – You may not be seeking me like you should right now, but fear not, someday (in the future) you *will* seek a relationship with me like I've intended—with all your heart!
- V. 14 – Not only will you seek me like you're supposed to, **YOU WILL FIND ME!** And—God goes on, I'll bring you back to where you're supposed to be ...

History has taught us, folks, that *God makes his promises good!* We can count on that! So, there may be bad days ... or 'uncertain' days ahead for all of us. Likely so. That's a part of life here on this earth. God's word to us today is to *know* this...

- God has a plan for us, even in our bad days ... and...
- Especially during the 'uncertain' days of life, we need to keep our eye on the ball—God's vision for us ... and on what God wants our lives to be about...

So, what are *your* hopes for the future? Do they exist even through the bad days? They'd better!

As I close today, let me give you ... **TWO WARNINGS:** Whatever you hear this morning, please hear this: **GOD DOESN'T WANT ANY FICKLE DISCIPLES!** Or God doesn't want any 'fair weather' disciples (to say it another way)! That's not what a *true* disciple is...

My granddaddy used to tell a little story about Christians being fickle. He'd say that it was like the young man who wanted to let his sweetheart know just how much he loved her. So, he'd tell her: "Honey, I love you more than anything! There's nothing that could possibly keep me away from you! Oh, and I'll be over to see you tonight ... as long as it doesn't rain."

Isn't that how we treat God sometimes? Yes, I know, it's *natural* to feel that we've been abandoned sometimes on our 'bad days' ... but is that reality? No. Think of Jesus ... on Good Friday. Even Jesus felt abandoned, but history proved otherwise. And God always makes his promises good! So, don't be a 'fickle' or 'fair weather' disciple! *God is still God on our bad days too—maybe more so!*

Folks, I'm very thankful to Pastor Jack Hayford, of the Church of the Way in California, for his thoughts on this topic that we're entering into. For much of what God has given me to share with you in these next few weeks—about getting through our 'bad days'—I've learned—at least in part—from Jack Hayford. And, something Jack has said on this topic has really stuck with me. He said this:

*Jesus has called us to a life of discipleship. And discipleship, in the most final terms, is a call to Calvary—the Cross. First and foremost, it's a call to receive forgiveness and salvation, as only God can give. But, then it's a call to go beyond being just 'forgiven penitents' to being 'growing disciples.' And the growth, service, and learning that takes place as a disciple of Christ ... is most practically played out 'NOT by the way we handle life's blessings, but by the way we live through its bad days.'*

So, we need to learn how to be Disciples of Christ during the bad days, too—what this series is all about. But one of the difficulties of 'making disciples'—even for the bad days--is kind of like this...

Once upon a time, there was a little boy who really had a problem. Every night, he would end up waking up and crying ... because he fell out of bed. His mother finally got pretty sick of this whole routine and finally asked her son, one night, what the problem was. "Why, son, do continually have this problem of falling out of bed." 'His answer? "Well, Mom, my problem seems to be this: I stop too close to where I get in."

Quite frankly, for many in the Church today, that's our problem too! As disciples, we 'stop too close to where we get in.' We ask for God's forgiveness for the sin in our lives, we receive God's gift of salvation, and then that's it. That's where we remain ... because we like being comfortable! But, folks, that's not what discipleship is all about. We need to move from 'justification' to 'sanctification'; John Wesley called it the process of 'going on to perfection.' We must *not* remain 'babes' in the faith, but we need to 'grow up' in the faith—not 'stopping too close to where we got in.' We need to grow up to the point where we can be disciples of Christ *even during the bad days*. And, starting next week, we're going to learn to do just that from Jesus—looking at the worst day of his life on this earth...

Let me close, this morning, with these thoughts...

- Just like the exiles in Jeremiah's day, folks, we need to know that God has a plan for our lives even during our bad days ... or our days of uncertainty... And...
- Just like the exiles, God's vision for our lives involves us *first* calling to God, seeking God out, and having God restore us to what he's called us to be...

Just like with the exiles, God's promises to each of us is no less... Folks, in the weeks to come, *I'll meet you at the Cross*, as we learn more about being disciples through the 'bad days' together...