

Fil-Am Community Church

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“LIVING POSITIVELY”

In 1985, a reality show began to air on TV called “**Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous**”. Every week, this show featured the extravagant lifestyles of wealthy entertainers, athletes, business moguls and the like. This series became immensely popular because it went on for 11 years. Through this series, TV viewers got an insight into the opulent residences and the glamorous lifestyles of the really wealthy. The show is long gone but the lifestyles of the rich and famous continue.

We’re going to start a new five week series today which I’m calling “Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous (in God’s eyes)”. Why did I call this series as such? It is because we want to highlight the difference in the lifestyles of those who don’t know Jesus and those who know Jesus.

This series is about managing our lives as Christians. If you’re not a Christian, although I hope you’ll be anyway, these messages will benefit you as well because we all need to manage our lives well, Christian or not, right?

So, in this series, we’re going to take a fresh look at what it really means to be a believer, to be a Christian. First of all, as a Christian you are already rich in God’s eyes. You have a rich inheritance. In Ephesians 1:3, Paul says, “*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.*” Then, in verse 7, he also says, “*In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us.*”

I won't exchange all these blessings for the riches of the world. Material things rust, burn, evaporate, disappear but spiritual blessings are there forever. Amen? So, Christian, you are rich in God's eyes. Say to your neighbor, "You are rich...in God's eyes".

Now, you're not only rich, you are also famous in God's eyes. You see, many people want or are longing for their 15 minutes of fame. They want to be noticed by the world. But fame, like riches, is fleeting and temporary as well. Here today, gone tomorrow. However, there's only one person you'd like to be noticed by and that's Jesus, the Creator and Master of the universe. And if he notices you then you are famous forever. I hope you are famous in God's eyes.

For the next five weeks I want us to look at the different lifestyles that mark a true believer. We're going to look at the kind of living that should characterize our lives. You see, Paul urges us as Christians to "*Live a life worthy of the calling you have received*". (Ephesians 4:1b) A part of that calling is to be living in a way that sets us apart from the rest of the world. So, in this series we're going to look at Living Positively, which is today's message; Living Lovingly, Pastor Dave is going to talk about that next week; Living Generously, this is the one you've been waiting for or afraid of; Living Thankfully, which is our anniversary and Thanksgiving message, and lastly, Living Expectantly, this is about life as a pregnant mother. Just kidding. It's about increasing your faith.

So, today I want us to look at living positively out of Jeremiah 29:11. Shall we all say this together? Many of you I'm sure know this by heart.

(Show slide after recitation)

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jer. 29:11)

This is one of the most-beloved verses in the Bible. I have often heard this verse quoted, and I have seen it on signs and posters and plaques. Many Christians

commit these words to memory. We inscribe them on graduation cards. We share them with those who are sick, discouraged or in some sort of difficult situation. For many people, this is the only verse from Jeremiah that they know.

Believe it or not, I found a web site called TopVerses.com that rates every verse in the Bible by popularity. Can you guess which is no. 1? John 3:16. Can you guess now which number is Jeremiah 29:11? Believe it or not, it is number 29.

Now, we will never properly understand this verse unless we know something about its background. The single most important fact is that it was written to the Jewish exiles in Babylon who had been forcibly removed from Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar. Having been uprooted from all they held dear, they now live hundreds of miles away from home, in the very heart of worldly pomp and pagan idol worship. All their dreams and hopes had been smashed. Deep inside they wondered, “How could God have let this happen? If we are truly his people, how did we end up here?”

We have all heard it said that when you hit rock bottom, there is nothing to do but look up. Here is a message for those who have hit rock bottom. And thanks be to God, it is a message of enormous hope. A message that will keep you positive in the midst of negative circumstances.

As we think about this beloved verse, keep this truth in mind: God will not always do what we expect him to do, but he will always do what he says he will do.

This morning, let me share with you three basic truths you need to know so you can live a hopeful, positive life.

I. God is thinking about me all the time.

“I know the plans I have for you.”

What I want you to notice here is the personal nature of this verse. Note it says, "I know...for you". It's person-to-person. Although this passage is for the whole nation of Israel since God wants to assure them of his love and care, it equally applies to every Israelite.

And equally applies in our day to any person who is a believer. That's why this verse has always been a source of comfort to anyone going through a difficult time.

Because of its personal nature, this verse can be translated as "*I know the thoughts that I think toward you*" (NKJV). God is thinking about you! That may be the most important statement you'll ever hear. He considers you, he knows you, he remembers you, he keeps you in mind. He knows who you are and where you are. He knows even the number of your hair, as the Bible says. Not for one second are you ever lost or forgotten for his heart is so big and his knowledge so vast that no one ever gets lost in the shuffle.

We don't always think about each other. We routinely get preoccupied with life and sometimes forget the people closest to us. We forget birthdays, anniversaries and graduations. Valentine's Day and Mother's Day slip up on us. I read the story of a man who said that he forgot Mother's Day until the very day itself so early in the morning, he went to the drugstore searching for a card and gift, only to find the store filled with other men, desperately doing the same thing. I was one of those.

But God never forgets his children. Even though he has the whole world to rule, he never forgets his own. The Jews really needed to know this because they were in exile in Babylon, far from home, carried away against their will, held against their will, under the absolute power of the Babylonian king, and able to do only what he permitted them to do. God has just said in verse 10 that they would be returning home but not after 70 years which was good news and bad news, good because it meant they wouldn't be in Babylon forever but bad because 70 years is a

long time to be in exile. And God says, “You think I’ve forgotten about you. You know that you are here because you forgot me, and it’s true that I am disciplining you for your disregard of my commands, but my discipline does not diminish my affection for you. You are forever in my thoughts. You are still my people. I have not forgotten you.”

Many times, like the ancient Israelites, I have said, “Lord, what are you doing? Why is this happening?” So much of life makes no sense. The good and the bad, the happy and the sad, it all gets jumbled together with apparently no rhyme or reason, and even if I say to myself, “God has a plan,” it’s rarely clear to me. But God knows what he is doing and he knows the plans he has for me even when everything doesn’t make sense.

He has you constantly on his mind. God is thinking about you—always.

II. God’s Plans for me are Good.

“Plans to prosper you and not to harm you.”

Now, it’s nice to know that God is thinking of you. But it gets better. Because he’s not only thinking of you. He is thinking of you because he has plans for you.

If you’re a woman and a guy you like tells you, “I’m thinking of you”, wouldn’t you feel flattered? And the next time you meet, “He tells you again, I’m thinking of you” you’ll feel good right? And the third time you meet, he says again, “I’m thinking of you” wouldn’t you say “What are your plans? Do you have any plans? Are we going out on a date or what?”

My wife always goes into a rant like that when it’s her birthday or our anniversary or even on Valentine’s Day. I let her know that I’m thinking of her. But she always says, “What are your plans? Are we going anywhere tonight? Are you really thinking of me?” Then, I start planning.

God is different. God is thinking of you is because he has great plans for you. First, to prosper you.

Now, we should be careful about this. God is not talking here about material prosperity as some who are preaching the health and wealth gospel would make us believe.

You see, the Hebrew word used here is “Shalom” which is commonly translated “peace”. It is a traditional greeting among Jews when they meet or depart. “Shalom Aleichem” is “Peace be upon you”. But “Shalom” can also mean harmony, wholeness, completeness, prosperity, and welfare. And so, God is saying “I have plans that will give you peace, make you whole, make you complete, put harmony in your life, make you prosper.”

You see, God knows your every struggle. God knows each pain you feel in your body. God is acutely aware of every heartache that grips your being. And he would like to give you hope. The Bible says, *“Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable. He gives strength to the weary, and to him who lacks might He increases power. Though youths grow weary and tired, and vigorous young men stumble badly, yet those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary.”* (Isaiah 40:28-31 NASB)

God wants you to know that there is hope when you’re feeling weak and tired. Stay positive.

But what is God trying to do when he allows his children to go through hard trials and deep suffering? There are several answers to that question. First, God is trying to purge us of sin and to purify us. Second, God uses suffering to test our faith. Will you still obey God in the darkness? Will you serve God when things

aren't going your way? Will you hold on to the truth when you feel like giving up? Third, God uses times of difficulty to humble us. When things are going well, we tend to get puffed up about our accomplishments. But let the darkness fall and we are on our knees crying out to God. Fourth, God uses hard times to prepare us to minister to others. He comforts us so that we may comfort others.

I know many Christians whose greatest ministry has come from sharing with others how God helped them through a time of crisis. Fifth, God uses hard times to prepare us for a new understanding of his character. In the furnace we discover God's goodness in a way we had never experienced it before.

God's plan is to prosper you. He doesn't plan to harm you.

No, no, no. God never plans to harm you in the tiniest bit. One thing we must understand is that God is not a malevolent God. He is a benevolent God. God is a God of compassion and mercy and love. Romans 8:5, *"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"*. The great God of the universe, if he were indifferent, if he were uncaring, if he ignored your pain and suffering, would never send his Son Jesus to die for your sins. You see, it is your sin and my sin that comes in between us and God. Satan introduced sin into the world when he tempted Adam and Eve. And because they fell into the trap of Satan, they became slaves of sin and death. Satan's goal is to harm humankind. Jesus says of Satan, *"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy"*. (John 10:10a)

But God's goal is to save us from sin and death. That is his plan all along because in Genesis 3:15 God says to Satan, *"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel."*

His plan to save us found its fulfillment when Jesus Christ came and died for us. As I've said many times in our previous series, Jesus came that we may have

life, and have it to full. That's well and good. And we can understand it. However, our emotions battle with our minds when we're faced with an enormous crisis.

Then, doubts creep in and we wonder whether God is really for us.

Ted Turner, the billionaire-owner of CNN, was planning to be a missionary when he was a teenager.

He was religious, he didn't want to join his father's business. Then when he was 15, his younger sister Mary Jane, whom he loved dearly, developed a rare form of lupus she never recovered from and after years of praying for her, she passed away. Turner got angry with God. He said in an interview, "I was taught that God was love and God was powerful and I couldn't understand how someone so innocent should be made or allowed to suffer so." Eventually, he gave up his faith and set his sight to becoming a success in the world.

Folks, God doesn't one anyone to die. God doesn't want to harm anyone. It was the enemy Satan who introduced sin and death into the world. But a time will come when God will put everything in order again. The death and resurrection of Jesus point to that reality. Someday, death will be a thing of the past. And if you're a Christian, death, in fact, is a transition from mortality to immortality. Because you'll just wake up in the presence of Jesus.

God is for us, not against us.

III. God intends to give me a future filled with hope.

"Plans to give you hope and a future."

Some people are afraid of the future and it causes stress in their lives. Because the future is unknown. You see, you don't know what to do when you don't know what's going to happen. But God promises to those who believe him that

everything will be all right. It may seem puzzling right now, but everything will work out in the end.

There's a saying that goes, "*I don't know what the future holds but I know who holds the future*". God holds the future. And his promise is that he will give you a future that is filled with hope. That's his guarantee. You can take that to the bank.

Do you know why God can give you hope and a future? It is because this is tied to one of God's best attributes – faithfulness.

What does faithfulness mean? It means God can't lie, God can't break a promise, God does exactly what He says He will do. This is just part of God. God cannot be unfaithful to you because of who He is. It's impossible.

2 Timothy 2:13 "*If we are faithless He will remain faithful for He cannot disown Himself.*" If somebody ever asks you "Is there anything God can't do?" say Yes. He can't be unfaithful. It's His nature to be faithful. That means God always keeps His promises. Psalm 145:13 "*The Lord is faithful to all his promises.*"

What does that have to do with my fear of the future? There are over 7000 promises in the Bible. They are like blank checks from God to you, waiting to be filled out for you to take advantage of. Time after time God says, "If you will just trust Me, I will do this in your life."

That's the key. You just need to trust God when it seems confusing now and you're afraid. You may have a child who is astray, or a husband who is unfaithful, or a relative who is very ill, or a job that may slip from you any moment, or bills that need payment, or everything seems to be going wrong at the same time. The Bible says in Proverbs 3:5 and I'm quoting from the Message version because I like what it says, "*Trust God from the bottom of your heart; don't try to figure out everything on your own.*"

Don't try to figure out everything on your own. It's hard to understand. But if you just put everything in God's hands, then you'll understand later on. God has already figured it out.

What, then, should we say in response to all of this? Our first and greatest need is to submit ourselves to our Heavenly Father and say very simply, "Lord, you know even though I don't know. You see what is ahead even when all is dark to me. You have a purpose even when my life seems to be going in circles. Nothing that is happening to me has come to me by chance."

Our position then ought to be one of ever-increasing hope in the Lord. I admit that is hard to do when you see your child suffering from cancer or when your marriage falls apart or your career dissolves or you cannot pay your bills or you suffer rejection. We all live in a fallen world, and we ourselves are fallen people, not yet what we could be or should be or someday will be. There is no Bible verse that can take away the pain of this world. But Jeremiah 29:11 leads us out of the darkness into the light.

"But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day" (Proverbs 4:18).

What difference does being a Christian make? Jesus Christ has died; he has risen from the dead. In his death he defeated sin; in his resurrection he defeated death. Our two greatest enemies lie at his feet, sin and death.

He utterly defeated them both. And the Lord Jesus has purchased us with his blood and brought us into God's family, guaranteeing our salvation. No wonder the Bible says, *"If God be for us, who can be against us?"* (Romans 8:31)

Let me end this message with a video clip. It is about God being for us. It is actually a commercial from values.org. They say it's a true story that happened years ago involving a famous concert pianist, I don't know. But the message is something we can bring home today.

Video – The Little Boy and the Pianist

Folks, that's the way it is with God. He encourages you to go on. He's by your side, telling you, "Keep going, keep going. Don't quit! We can make beautiful music together. Just trust in me. I'll carry you through. I have plans for you. I'll give you a hope and a future". Friend, there's a reason to be positive. There's a reason to be hopeful. God is always thinking of you. He thinks of you because he has good plans for you. He doesn't want to harm you. In fact, his plans for you in the future is filled with hope.