

Broadly speaking, the gospel is the glad announcement that God saves sinners. The sovereign God in mercy saves helpless, guilty, unworthy sinners through Christ crucified and buried for us, risen again and seen by many witnesses (1 Cor 15.1-4). This saving purpose and divine accomplishment are foreshadowed in countless announcements of deliverances in the OT. Providence caused those deliverances and the Scriptures that explain them.

The Babylonian exile (6th cent. BC) was especially distressing and hopeless for the Jews. It seemed God had abandoned them as His people, but Jeremiah sent good news from the LORD to them. God would bring them home to their own land, the land of Israel and they would again enjoy fellowship with God (Jer 29.10-14). God kept this promise in history, and this passage is still a blessed comfort to all God's people everywhere to the end.

Exposition of Jeremiah 29.11—a Verse about God's Thoughts

1. Certain Thoughts. God promises He will cause their return after 70 years (v. 10). How is that return certain? "For I know the thoughts that I think," or, "plans that I am planning." Both are correct translations. A deep truth here: God's "thoughts" and "plans" are the same thing and always effectual. In God, to plan and to do are not separated, for He is almighty (Isa 14.24, 27; cf. Psa 115.3). God in Himself acts eternally (without beginning, end, or succession); the effects of His one eternal act are creation and providence in time. All happenings are "not a series of unplanned, accidental events. He said, 'I know the plans' (lit., 'I, I know'; emphatic in Heb.)" (NAC). The beginning, course, and end of all creation in every detail are all predetermined by the Almighty. "By Him all things consist" [hold together, Col 1.17]. "He holds all creation together" (NLT).

All things that are done or happen are most surely foreseen, known, and appointed by God Himself from eternity, yea even that they are present to Him before they really exist, are done or thus happen; and therefore that the whole world is so ruled by Him alone, that nothing is done or happens therein, except by the will and pleasure of God alone (Confession of the Glastonbury Congregation, 1551).

2. Covenantal Thoughts. God's thoughts/plans are "towards you" (pl.)—the exiled Jews; by implication, all God's elect. God has expressed His "voluntarily condescension" toward us "by way of covenant" (2LCF 7.1). This "covenant of grace" (7.2) is "revealed in the gospel" (7.3)—a promise of God's eternal purpose to save a chosen people by the gifts of Christ and the Holy Spirit. God's eternal plan to save sinners includes some sinners and not others, and it is an effectual plan. His certain, covenantal thoughts are towards us: believers, and some not yet believers.

By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated, or foreordained to eternal life through Jesus Christ, to the praise of his glorious grace; others being left to act in their sin to their just condemnation, to the praise of his glorious justice. These

angels and men thus predestinated and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed, and their number so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished (2LCF 3.3, 4).

3. Comforting Thoughts. "Saith the LORD." A secret without His testimony. He reveals His thoughts to comfort us. "It would appear that when Jeremiah wrote this letter there was resentment against Yahweh and a loss of confidence" (NICOT, in loc.). The shock and hardship of exile sorely tested their faith. So do our severe trials (cf. Psa 77.6-9). BUT → the gospel you hear is "a balm for every grief, an amends for every loss, a motive for every duty, a restraint from every evil, a pattern for every thing which a Christian is called to do or suffer" (*Works of John Newton* 1.668).
4. Compassionate Thoughts. "Of peace, and not of evil." Alts. are many: welfare/calamity, prosperity/harm, well-being/misfortune, success/disaster, etc. God's sovereign, effectual purpose toward you is merciful, gracious, loving, generous—in a word, compassionate (Psa 103.7-13). The elect are "vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory," and the rest are "vessels of wrath fitted to destruction" (Rom 9.22, 23).
5. Culminating Thoughts. "To give you an expected end" (mg., end and expectation). Alt., "a future with hope" (NRSV). "The spirit of the [idiom is]: 'to give you the end, yes—the end you hope for': *i.e.*, the end which I have promised and on which I have caused you to hope and depend" (Bullinger, *Figures of Speech* 661). How good and how great do you hope and expect eternal blessedness will be? It is far, far better than that. It is to "be filled with all the fulness of God . . . [which is] exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph 3.19, 20).

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God is bringing us Christian believers to incomprehensible blessedness, and knowing this now comforts us in all our trials.

Related Truths

1. God Appoints Seasons of Miserable Trials for His Church. "When ye fall into divers temptations" (various trials, Jas 1.2). "Beloved, think it not strange" (1 Pet 4.12). "We must through many tribulations enter" God's kingdom (Acts 14.22). Suffering is painful, but it is to be expected.
2. God's Grace Is Sufficient While We Suffer (2 Cor 12.7-9). It is better to be God's people in exile than idolaters at home in this world (Psa 17.14).
3. God's Power and Faithfulness Are the Basis for Our Confidence. His eternal decree & gospel covenant—unknown to many—ground our faith.
4. "Behind a Frowning Providence, He Hides a Smiling Face" (Cowper). Greeting: "God is good." Answer: "All the time." Sun shines every day.
5. God Is Love. Proof: Gift of Christ (1 Jn 4.8-10). Prelude to glorification.

Practical Applications

1. Keep Believing in “the Love that God Hath for Us” (1 Jn 4.16). Providence’s heavy blows tempt some to doubt His love, to become bitter toward Him, even to atheism. If you are a Christian, it is totally unfounded to doubt His love for you and His purpose to bless you in the end! And even unbelievers ought to be humbled under calamities. “Know therefore that God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth” (Job 11.6). If you would repent and trust in the Lord as you should, then you could know that He purposes in love to save you also.
2. Keep Rejoicing in God No Matter the Circumstances. “The joy of the Lord is your strength” (Neh 8.10). Adopt Habakkuk’s resolution (ch. 3):
 - 17 Though the fig tree should not blossom,
 nor fruit be on the vines,
 the produce of the olive fail
 and the fields yield no food,
 the flock be cut off from the fold
 and there be no herd in the stalls,
18 yet I will rejoice in the LORD;
 I will take joy in the God of my salvation.
 - 19 God, the Lord, is my strength;
 he makes my feet like the deer’s;
 he makes me tread on my high places.
3. Hope to the End for the Grace That Is to be Brought unto You at the Revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Pet 1.13). Foreshadowed in the return from Babylonian captivity, and just as sure! Christ’s resurrection is the firstfruits of our blessed experience at the consummation of all things! “²⁰ But now is Christ risen from the dead, *and* become the firstfruits of them that slept . . . ²³ But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming” (1 Cor 15). Ω