**Plans to Prosper**

As we navigate through this pandemic, there are many challenges and snares. The obvious ones are:

Keeping yourself and your family safe from the virus

Learning to exist in extreme Shelter-in-place circumstances

Coping with loss of livelihood, loss of freedom, in some cases loss of loved ones.

Keeping your mind and soul focused on the Truth of God rather than “worldly chatter”.

This last one is very important.

The enemy thrives in three areas that are all at play in the current situation:

1. Fear
2. Division
3. Deception

Let’s look at each of these;

***Fear:***

We have already established that fear is not of God.

***1 John 4:8 “God is Love”***

***1 John 4:18 “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear….”***

But when we see so much devastation, danger and uncertainty in the world, it’s natural for us to be afraid.

That’s why it’s SO important to look not in the natural, but in the spirit.

*[ Remember Elisha and his servant? Once his spiritual eyes were open He saw the truth of the situation, an Army of Angels protecting them at all sides. ]*

It’s a matter of choosing to allow your mind to be governed by the spirit, not the flesh.

**Romans 8:6** “The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace

I encourage you, when you are afraid, to stop and take every thought captive and allow God to govern your mind. He will give you power, love and a sound mind.

**2 Tim. 1:7** “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.”

What is a Sound Mind?

It’s a stable. Secure, and unshaken mind that is not easily tormented or lead astray.

We need to have a sound mind in these insecure times, God will give it to us if we focus on Him.

***DIVISION:***

One of the oldest military strategies in the book is “divide and conquer”, when an enemy army sees a superior foe, they try to divide them and defeat them separately instead of all at once.

Our enemy knows this as well. He now has the advantage of physical separation whereas he can make us feel isolated, detached, alone and disconnected from the rest of the body.

We need to combat that by staying connected with each other every opportunity that we can, gathering online, reaching out to one another, checking in with one another and praying for one another.

Another type of division that he uses against us is dissention.

Dissention: Disagreement in opinion, partisan and contentious divisions; strife; discord; quarrelling; breach of friendship.

There are a lot of opinions, suspicions, frustrations and passionate disagreements out there, and many of them have found their way into the church. This time is stressful for many people, especially during a pandemic, economic crisis and election year. Things are very volatile out there.

We need to guard against them, they are sent by the enemy as division devices to reap destruction.

I know you feel strongly about injustice, deception, godlessness and foolishness, I do too. But we have to find a way to not play into the enemies hand as dividers. We all probably have more presence on Social media and electronic interaction than ever before, and there are heated conflicts out there that tend to draw us in. Ask the Lord to give you the right words to respond, or don’t respond at all.

In Matthew 10, Jesus sent the 12 apostles out to minister into hostile environments, and one of the things he said to them before they left was;

**Matt 10:16** “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmlessas doves.”

In these times, we need to draw together as the Body of Christ not split apart. Unity is of vital importance. Remember, Unity is not Uniformity, we will have differences of opinion, but Jesus’ fervent prayer for us is that we “be one, as he and the Father are one”.

The last thing I want us to beware of is

***Deception***

Deception, is by far the most powerful weapon of the enemy. His powers are limited, so he uses his ability to deceive to cause destruction on the earth.

**Rev 12:9** “So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world”

(Not a fire breathing dragon or a poisonous snake…a deceiver.)

There is deception everywhere. Media, marketing, News, advertising, even in *the church*.

**Matt 24:24** “For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.”

That’s why it is SO important to root yourself in Truth, because

“truth is the opposite of deception”

**John 18:37-38** (Jesus said to Pilate) “I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.” **38**Pilate said to Him, “What is truth?”

Truth is the Word of God. Our best defense again deception is the Word of God.

Jesus in His prayer to the Father:

**John 17:17** “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.”

Deception can be damaging to us as a church body, our spirits and our relationship with God.

A very popular verse that is circulated from time to time that is a beautiful expression of the Hope that we have in the Lord.

The verse is:

**Jer. 29:11** 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.

There is a very interesting back-story to this verse, that has a lot to do with deception in the time of the prophets.

Two prophets brought forth very different messages to the people of God at one time. One was truth, one was false. Both contained messages for the recent captives of Babylon.

The false prophecy, seemed easier to accept and made a lot of sense, but it would have probably meant the end of the perpetuity of the people of God, and they may have ceased to exist if they followed it.

The true prophecy seemed more difficult to accept at first but contained God’s promise of prosperity if they kept to it.

The two prophets were Hananiah and Jeremiah.

It took place in 597BC, just before the destruction of the first temple (586BC).

Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon had come and taken the first wave of captives from Jerusalem to Babylon.

Both Hananiah and Jeremiah prophesied concerning the amount of time that the captivity would last, and would to do while you are held captive.

Listen to the two prophecies that were given:

1st the Prophecy of Hananiah;

**Jer. 28:1-4**In the fifth month of that same year, the fourth year, early in the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, the prophet Hananiah son of Azzur, who was from Gibeon, said to me in the house of the Lord in the presence of the priests and all the people: **2**“This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: ‘I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon. **3**Within two years I will bring back to this place all the articles of the Lord’s house that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon removed from here and took to Babylon. **4**I will also bring back to this place Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah and all the other exiles from Judah who went to Babylon,’ declares the Lord, ‘for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.’

(this sounds wonderful, in fact it’s very optimistic, considering the gravity of what was taking place).

In fact even Jeremiah wished it were true. His response was,

**Jer. 28:5-7** “Then the prophet Jeremiah replied to the prophet Hananiah before the priests and all the people who were standing in the house of the Lord. **6**He said, “Amen! May the Lord do so! May the Lord fulfill the words you have prophesied by bringing the articles of the Lord’s house and all the exiles back to this place from Babylon. **7**Nevertheless, listen to what I have to say in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people:

**Jer 28:15-16**“…Then the prophet Jeremiah said to Hananiah the prophet, “Listen, Hananiah! The Lord has not sent you, yet you have persuaded this nation to trust in lies. **16**Therefore this is what the Lord says: ‘I am about to remove you from the face of the earth. This very year you are going to die, because you have preached rebellion against the Lord.’”

Jeremiah knew that God had a plan for the captivity. But he also knew that it included a lot more than two years and then everything is restored. So many great things took place in Babylon that God had planned for His people over the next 70 years that Hananiah’s prophecy completely disregarded, including;

The miracle of the fiery furnace, Daniel in the Lion’s den, Daniel’s vision and prophecy, Babylon being conquered and God raising up King Cyrus who granted freedom to the Jews to rebuild Jerusalem

Jeremiah knew that God’s plan was different than Hananiah’s prophecy, but when he originally spoke about it in Jer. 25, they nearly put him to death. He knew that they were more interested in hearing the lies of Hananiah than the truth of God.

Very similar to how things were in New Testament times and today as well;

**2nd Tim. 4:3** “**3**For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.”

Jeremiah’s prophecy from the Lord, while it was not what they wanted to hear, included instructions from the Lord along with a promise to bless them and restore them.

There is truth in these words that we can carry with us today in our “captivity”.

**Jer. 29:4-14** ”This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon:

**5**“Build houses and settle down;

plant gardens and eat what they produce.

**6**Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease.

**7**Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”

**8**Yes, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: “Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have. **9**They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them,” declares the Lord.

**10**This is what the Lord says: “When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place.

***11****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.*

**12**Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. **13**You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. **14**I will be found by you,” declares the Lord,

“and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.”

Jeremiah’s prophecy was very different than Hananiah’s but is what not a prophecy of doom, it was a prophecy of promise and hope.

Here’s what it said:

* + “Build houses and settle down;
    - In other words, don’t exist as if in a temporary state. Fully embrace your circumstances and situation. The time in this place is significant, don’t rush it or waste it.
  + plant gardens and eat what they produce.
    - Work, labor and invest in your livelihood. Tis is not a hiatus or sabbatical from being productive .God has given you talents. Abilities, and opportunities, it may be different now, but it is not insignificant.
  + Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease.
    - If the Israelites followed Hananiah’s prophecy, they would probably not have reproduced during captivity, and within a generation or two, would’ve died off. Instead, they increased while in exile, much like they did in Egypt.
    - Don’t be afraid to live your life in these times, do not let your hopes, dreams and vision for your future or the future of your family be put on hold. God is still your provider, regardless of your circumstances .
  + Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”
    - Our job is to be Peacemakers, not pot-stirrers. We can disagree with government officials, policy, decisions and ordinances but we must seek the “peace and prosperity” of the land we live in. Let God be our rewarder and provider, not the government or our own self-sufficiency.

In other words: ***“Bloom where you’re planted.”***

* Don’t wait for all this to be over to be fruitful.
* Now is the time to plant new crops, explore new ideas and cast vision.
* Find opportunities to serve the Lord and fulfill your purposes in this life.
* Finish projects, start new ones, look for ways to help others and do ministry.
* DON’T put your valuable gifts, resources and talents on “indefinite hold” until it’s over.
* It may clear up very rapidly out there and everything goes back to relative normalcy sometime soon.
* It also may take much longer than any of us expect.
* Either way,
* Take this time to live your life and lay hold of all the things God has for you every day.

If you do, You will experience the promised blessing that comes with it:

**Jeremiah 29:11-14**

***11****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.*

**12**Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. **13**You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. **14**I will be found by you,” declares the Lord,

May that be true of all of us in these days…

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