

God's Plan in Your Life

While preparing for this week's lessons, I ran across the following statement:

"Life is growing increasingly complex. Our minds are overloaded with information. The pace of modern day change is problematic for our society. Our minds are having difficulty keeping pace with the scientific, technological, cultural and social innovation of our times. Values are eroding. There does not seem to be anything left to guide our actions. The wisdom of the past seems to have lost its validity. The past has lost its validity and we do not have a clear vision of the future. Our view of the world is narrowed by what is going on at the moment. The negative developments are overemphasized while the positive ones elude us. We focus on the small negative things around us and fail to view the whole picture.

*"What we need is a framework that ties everything together, that allows us to understand society, the world, and our place in it. We need something to help us make the critical decisions which will shape our future." (F. Heylighen, *What Is A Worldview*, Principia Cybernetica web page).*

There was a day when kids took pocketknives to school to swap with one another. Today it is hard for an adult to get on an airplane with a pair of fingernail clippers. A foreboding climate of anxiety and despair hangs over our lives. No one seems to have answers. It is enough to instill a nightmarish existence. We need something or someone to pull us together. We need someone to guide us. We need a philosophy of life that will help us pull it all together so we can see the bigger picture. God's word seeks to give us such a view of society, the world and our place in it. His word is designed to give us answers.

There are times when even the worst and the best of people need to be reminded how God is still on His throne fulfilling His plans for their personal lives. This is especially true when it seems as though the world is against you. It is especially true when we think God has deserted us.

The story of salvation from Genesis to Revelation is about how we must set our hope on God. This is precisely what the psalmist is reminding himself of as he pens Psalms 2. The psalmist sees God on His throne in Heaven **laughing** as the world scorns His plans for the Israelites; and not only for Israel, but God's plan for themselves. Even though they did not realize it, God's plans for Israel included them as well. Psalms 2:1-12 (NIV) says:

"Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the Earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against His Anointed One."

“Let us break their chains,’ they say, ‘and throw off their fetters.’

“The One enthroned in Heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. Then He rebukes them in His anger and terrifies them in His wrath, saying, ‘I have installed My King on Zion, My holy hill.’

“I will proclaim the decree of the Lord.’

“He said to Me, ‘You are My Son; today I have become Your Father. Ask of Me, and I will make the nations Your inheritance, the ends of the Earth Your possession. You will rule them with an iron scepter; You will dash them to pieces like pottery.’

“Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the Earth. Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for His wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in Him.”

The psalmist lived in a time when the negative developments around him outweighed the positive, but he refused to live a nightmarish existence. He does not see himself as hopeless, even though the nations around him desired his destruction, and the people in his own nation conspired against him. The rulers of the Earth were crying for rebellion against him. He simply reminds himself that God will rebuke them with an iron scepter. He simply determines that he will serve the sovereign Lord Who will work things out in His own time.

He sought to see it all from the eternal perspective of the kingdom of God. The world was against him, but he understood God ruled. His belief in God helped him develop a philosophy of life that allowed him to see the bigger picture. He understood the world order of things and his place in it.

The second psalm is the most quoted psalm in the New Testament. Prayerful Christians understood what God was doing through Christ as the fulfillment of the psalmist hopes and dreams. The Jewish priests and elders brought Peter and John before the Sanhedrin to be tried for healing a crippled man. Fear overcame the religious leaders; they were persuaded to release Peter and John. Peter and John returned reporting how things transpired. In it all Christians see God fulfilling the promises of Psalms 2 as they quote the verses of the psalm in their prayers in Acts 4:23-31 (NIV):

“On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. ‘Sovereign Lord,’ they said, ‘You made the heaven and the Earth and the sea, and everything in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of Your servant, our father David:

“Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the Earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against His Anointed One.’

“Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against Your holy servant Jesus, Whom You anointed. They did what Your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable Your servants to speak Your word with great boldness. Stretch out Your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.’

“After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.”

It has been said the Old Testament is the New Testament concealed and the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed. Christ’s message and mission gave Christians 20/20 hindsight into the mysteries of the messianic promises of the Old Testament. More importantly is that now they see how they were included in God’s plan. Their prayers reveal their belief that now God is moving on their behalf to fulfill the promises in Psalm 2. They see God continue to work deliverance as He salvages their lives. They understand it all as part of the promise made in Psalm 2.

God’s plan seems mysterious, but He rules, He is working things out according to His plan, and each of us is included in it. God’s plan was mysterious to the prophets and to even the angels. They were secrets hidden in the very heart of God. The angels often scratched their heads at what God was doing. They had no clue. They could not make sense of it. However, Christians see the revelation of the message clearly. Christ *is* the mystery revealed. As the Apostle Peter writes in 1 Peter 1:10-12 (NIV):

“Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but You, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from Heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.”

And the Apostle Paul writes in Colossians 2:2-3 (NIV):

“My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that

they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in Whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

Although we see the Messianic overtones in the psalm, the person writing this psalm understands the relevance of the psalm for himself. It is not just a futuristic hope of what God will do through a Messiah. It certainly is that. But it is much more. The psalmist sees himself in the eternal plan of God. So should you and I. It is also about his relationship to God. It is about how God is using him to bring about His plan in Christ. He knows he is included in God's plan because he is also a son of God.

Our hope lies in a God Who is up close and personal. His plan for our personal lives often seems mysterious. We do not know what tomorrow will bring. If God openly revealed His plan to us it would cause even more anxiety. Imagine a finite mind wrestling with plans of an infinite intelligence. If Satan knew God's specific plan for each of us, he would use this knowledge to make our lives more difficult. What general would not use his knowledge of his opponents plans to defeat his opponent. God's plans for each of us are mysterious for good reason.

We can rest assured God is in control. He has a plan. We must follow one step at a time as it is revealed. When Paul was in Corinth he was reminded that God was with him. He was reminded that God was in control. God revealed that he was using Paul to fulfill His plan to save many Corinthians. As Luke records it in Acts 18:5-17 (NIV):

“When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. But when the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, ‘Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.’

“Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized.

“One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: ‘Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.’ So Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.

“While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him into court. ‘This man,’ they charged, ‘is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law.’

“Just as Paul was about to speak, Gallio said to the Jews, ‘If you Jews were making a complaint about some misdemeanor or serious crime, it would be reasonable for me to listen to you. But since it involves questions about words and names and your own law – settle the matter yourselves. I will not be a judge of such things.’ So he had them ejected from the court. Then they all turned on Sosthenes the synagogue ruler and beat him in front of the court. But Gallio showed no concern whatever.”

God reminded Paul how he was ruling from Heaven. Listen to this passage again:

“One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: ‘Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.’ So Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.”

Paul had the religious world against him. It does not get any worse than having the religious crowd against you! Trying to save those who think they are already saved is the toughest job in the world. Amazingly, God raised up leaders in Corinth from the ranks of non-believers to protect Paul. God forces Gallio to weigh in on Paul’s difficulties. Paul escapes unscathed – just as God promised. God rules.

Yes, indeed, God rules, but it is amazing how God’s promises do not always remove fear and doubt. Paul was pressured far beyond his ability to endure. He was forced to rely upon God. Paul learned to set his hope on God, as he tells us in 2 Corinthians 1:8-11 (NIV):

“We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, Who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and He will deliver us. On Him we have set our hope that He will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.”

Paul sees God actively working to fulfill His plan to bring salvation to Corinth. He also experiences his personal deliverance – salvation – as he seeks to save those God sent him to save. God is on His throne, but He gets into the very heart of Paul.

There is no doubt that Scripture such as Psalms 2 inspired Paul to write these verses in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 and Romans 8:18-19 (NIV):

“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”

“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.”

God’s rule gives all hope. We may think the hope God offers is reserved only for the heroes of the Bible. However, they were called long before they became heroes. We tend to forget that hope was extended to them while they were yet sinners. And they did not live perfect lives after they were called by God. God’s plan includes every person who has ever sinned or will ever sin. It is offered to scoffers and the ungodly as well as it is to those who are sincerely seeking Him. The book of 1st Corinthians reveals the sorts of people in Corinth God sends Paul to salvage.

“Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” (1 Corinthians 6:9-11 [NIV])

Paul mentions all those who will be lost, and then unashamedly reminds the Corinthians that is what they were before they were sanctified in Christ. Imagine, Paul addressing these sinners as saints! I am amazed at what many believe one must do to become a saint. The Corinthians became sanctified the moment they believed and were baptized in Christ. Luke writes, “ . . . ***many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized.***” (Acts 18:8 [NIV]) The Apostle Paul says, they “ . . . ***were washed, they were sanctified, and they were justified.***”

It is certainly encouraging to understand that every move God has ever made or will ever make is designed to salvage His relationship with each of us through Jesus Christ. Each decision God makes today is designed to give us a future bigger than anything we are capable of imagining.

God is working His plan in your life. Are you willing to accept His plan?