

Prosperity – God Wants to Bless

Jeremiah 29:4-14

Friends - this morning I need to tell you that God wants to bless you, that He wants to prosper you and that the prosperity He gives you is to be a sign of His love and grace for you.

Because brothers and sisters - grace is more than being let off from the consequences that we deserve - that would be mercy and mercy is good – but Grace is better.

Grace is when we receive something good - that we don't deserve.

And so friends – I have a scripture verse for you this morning.

Jeremiah 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.”*

And even though this verse was not originally for us – it's from Jeremiah's letter to those Israelites who had been exiled by God and lived in captivity in Babylon – I had a strong sense this past week that the Holy Spirit wanted us to hear it, believe it and claim the promise in it for ourselves - personally.

And I'm pretty sure that this was the Holy Spirit nudging me in this direction, because it's not something I would normally consider doing – in fact one of my pet peeves when preachers take this verse and use it out of context.

In fact I wouldn't consider that those of us living on the Westside of Calgary which, even in these tough economic times, is a very prosperous part of one of the most prosperous cities, in one of the most prosperous nations in the world would need to hear a message on Prosperity – unless perhaps it was to warn us or confront us about prospering through unjust or immoral means.

But that's not what this verse is about – this verse is about God's reassurance to his covenant people that He will not

forget about them, He will not abandon them – even though they might deserve it for all their unfaithfulness.

Instead, when the time of exile is over God still has plans for them, a future for them and he will restore them – bless them and make them prosper... and friends the Holy Spirit wants us to claim that for ourselves today too.

Because, deep down - we might have our doubts that the Almighty, all knowing, all present God who always was, always is and always will be - is actually good.

I mean sure we'll say "God is Good" and answer back "All the time!" because we don't think God is bad... after all 1 John 1:5 says "*God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.*"

But do we trust that God has a good heart towards us? Are we confident in His benevolent nature? Do we expect our Heavenly Father to be lavish and extravagant towards us? Like the Father in Jesus' parable who was waiting for his disgraced

son to return home and blew the budget on the welcome home party!

Is that the sort of person we automatically think God to be when we think about God?

Certainly the Israelites who were in exile would have had a hard time believing this – especially when they knew why they were in exile and that they deserved to be in exile.

And I don't know about you – but when I've given into my sinful nature – yet again, and when I know better too, and then, in the next couple days something bad but completely unrelated happens... well I'll admit it - it's hard not wonder if God isn't somehow "smiting" me for what I've done wrong, even though I know that's not how God works. It still kind of feels like it is.

Or if you happen to be going through a rough patch in your life with relationships, in your work, or with your health or someone you love is going through these things – it can be

hard, given the circumstances you see around you to believe that God is truly Good and that He is working through all negative things for your good.

And maybe you've been praying about this rough patch you've been going through in your life and God hasn't answered your prayers just yet...

and you are reading through your bible and you come across Proverbs 15:29 which says *"The Lord is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous."* And you wonder – maybe God considers me wicked and I'm not righteous and that's why my prayer isn't being answered???

Or maybe you struggle to believe that you are worthy of receiving something good or extravagant, even though Christ sacrificed his own life to purchase you for God and He calls you His own and you are a child of the King – you know that but you still somehow don't really believe you are that special to God.

You have time believing that God wants to make a fuss over you and splurge on you like a dad taking his little girl out for a triple scoop ice-cream or a mom letting her little boy get that cool toy dinosaur which caught his eye while they were out shopping...

We might believe that God is good, but not that good!

Yes he's forgiven our sins in Christ who took our punishment on himself and thank goodness we didn't get what we deserved - but we shouldn't be presumptuous and expect that God is going to give us all sorts of good things in life.

We might even go so far as to remind ourselves that if we hadn't been such a hot mess, Christ wouldn't have had to suffer so much on our behalf in the first place – so we'd better pull up our socks and do a better job of living and not expect too much more from God who's done more than enough for us already.

I don't know – are any of these striking a chord with you friends?

But we need to remember friends - mercy is when don't get what we deserve, but grace is when we get something good that we don't deserve and but I believe I am supposed to prophesy that into your lives this morning friends.

I believe that God want to do more in our lives with His grace, and He wants you to experience His Father-of –the- Prodigal-Son type extravagance in your life in some way, and so I am supposed to help get that started by speaking it into your life and proclaiming to you this morning...

Friends- God is going to prosper you!

Because He wants to help you understand how much you are loved by Him, how He delights in you – just because you are you!

Yes we're affected by sin – but He has taken care of that, and He is taking care of that through Jesus Christ and the on-going work of the Holy Spirit, and now He just wants to bless you and give you what is good in life!

So He will prosper you and help you understand in a tangible way the reality of the spiritual blessings and prosperity that He has given us in Jesus Christ.

In fact, God's extravagant gifts do more than help us understand what we've received in Jesus – God actually works through them - because they are manifestations of His grace.

Through his blessings He fills us with His grace and heals the brokenness that sin has caused in us and enables us to bless others.

Are you familiar with the story of Babette's feast? Let me share it with you...

Babette is a refugee who has fled from the bloody counter-revolution in Paris in 1871, and ended up in a remote village on the western coast of Denmark. She is taken in by two elderly sisters, both pious Christians, and lives with them as their housekeeper.

It's a big transition from city life in Paris to a small sea-side village in Denmark, where she is considered an outsider. But gradually over the years her unassuming nature and tenacious spirit allow her to be accepted into this small community.

The only connection she keeps to her former life in Paris is a lottery ticket – and she has a friend in Paris who renews the ticket for her each year, and this goes on for fourteen years.

Then one day, she gets word that she has won the lottery - a prize of 10,000 francs – which would be worth about \$50,000.00 today.

Instead of using her winnings to return to Paris – she requests that the sisters allow her to cook a special feast to help them

celebrate the 100th birthday of their deceased father – a minister who had founded their small village.

The sisters agree and Babette starts the preparations for the feast, importing all the finest silverware, crystal, linens, china and ingredients directly from Paris...

The menu would start with the first course of buckwheat cakes with caviar and sour cream, turtle soup, and a salad with Belgian endive and walnuts.

The main course was quail in pastry puff shells with foie gras and truffle sauce, with a side selection of Blue Cheese, papaya, figs, grapes and pineapple.

The grand finale was a rum sponge cake with figs and glacéed fruits for deserts.

To wash it all down there were various wines, spirits and champagnes of the finest quality that France had to offer.

And all the while, she kept it a secret that she was intended to spend all her winnings on this dinner.

So as the supplies and ingredients begin to arrive, the residents of this remote little village begin to worry that this meal will become the occasion of sinful pleasure and decadence as they have never seen such luxury and sumptuousness before.

So they meet with the sisters and they agree they will eat the meal, but they will say nothing of the richness or extravagance of the setting or the food as they eat it.

In other words they are going to enjoy this experience of dining on fine French cuisine as if it were nothing more than a hunk of stale bread and watery gruel because they think the blessing and extravagance of the meal is too much.

Finally the day of the feast arrives and the villagers gather to be served this lavish expression of Babette's gratitude and love towards them.

They fully intend to refrain from showing any sign of enjoyment or giving any indication that they are enjoying this fine cuisine – but an unexpected guest spoils their plans.

One of the villagers has a nephew, who at one point was an Attaché in Paris, and he has come to pay his aunt a visit, and so he is invited to the feast as well, but He is unaware that the rest of the villagers intend to refrain from commenting on the food.

The nephew is well acquainted with fine French cuisine and he is blown away that in this remote part of Denmark he is having a fine dining experience that equals the best he ever had in Paris!

So throughout the dinner, he regales the other villagers with all the details about the various entrees; dishes, wines and tables settings and how it reminds him of his dining experience at the Café Anglais in Paris.

And even though the villagers are trying not to let on that they are enjoying this sumptuous dinner, this lavish expression of love and gratitude has an effect on them.

As the meal progresses they are elevated physically and spiritually – old wrongs are righted, friendships are renewed, distrust and superstition are left behind and any fears that this dinner would turn into an occasion of sinful decadence are forgotten.

Instead there is a mystical sense of redemption that settles over the guests as they enjoy the rich blessings of Babette's feast.

And friends – this story is a great illustration of how God wants to bless us, how He wants to prosper us, and how His good gifts can fill us with His grace, and bring His redemption into our lives and the lives of others.

And I hope we can see the foolishness in refraining from receiving and fully enjoying something that was intended for

us to delight in because we are scared of sin. Especially when enjoying the gift in itself can be a means of experiencing how much God loves you and wants to bless you and can fill you with gratitude towards Him – and this overcomes sin.

Friends, as people who live in a prosperous neighborhood, in a prosperous city, in a prosperous country it can be easy to be suspicious of this prosperity.

To view it as something which becomes the occasion for our sinfulness to cause us to worship the gift instead of the giver and so we decide that we're going to refrain from saying about prosperity.

We're not going to focus on the nice homes and nice cars and nice clothes and all the other nice things that come with this prosperity which God has bestowed upon our neighborhood and city.

And yet by not saying anything about it friends, we allow our friends and neighbors and family members and coworkers to

go on thinking that this prosperity is a simply a result of their own hard work and fortuitous circumstances - instead of something that God has given us.

And so they will naturally continue to worship the gift, because they do not know about the Giver...

And as a result God goes unrecognized; He is not thanked or complemented on His incredible blessings that He has given His very life to redeem –

“For God so loved the world (the beautiful arrangement) that He sent His only son...” (John 3:16)

So friends – we must speak about prosperity, we must recognize God’s good gifts and point out that these good gifts come from a good giver – and praise Him and complement Him and give Him recognition and honor in front of anyone who will listen.

Let us not shy away from telling our friends and neighbors the truth that our prosperity is a gift from God – who is a really good God!

Friends, let us not doubt that God has a good heart towards us – He wants nothing more than to bless us, to have us enjoy the things He gives to us, to delight in this world and every part of the creation He created for us - from rocks and trees to skies and seas, romance and designer pants, and everything else in between.

“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)

Friends this verse is for you this morning – will you receive it? Will you accept it in faith and trust that God is good – not just good – but really really good!

And will you trust His promise that He has plans for you – plans to prosper you to give you hope and a future?

In the big picture friends that is our salvation. This promise will ultimately be fulfilled when our Lord Jesus returns and brings in the new heavens and the new earth; that is our future – our hope.

And then we will live in this world without sin, unaffected by pain and sorrow, no sickness, no homelessness, no war, no missing airplanes, no layoffs, no divorces, no more brokenness...

And so accepting and claiming this verse for yourself is to put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ as the savior of the world – in every sense of what that can mean...

And that faith and trust can be lived out and expressed in some very practical ways – so listen to what Proverbs says we can do - in faith - to claim the promise of prosperity.

11:25 *“A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.”*

16:20 *“Whoever gives heed to instruction prospers, and blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord.”*

21:21 *“Whoever pursues righteousness and love finds life, prosperity and honor”*

So friends – as you go about your day to day business this week and in the months ahead... be generous, do what is right, pay heed to the truth you learn at church and in the scriptures and live by it.. and God will prosper you.

Not just a little bit, not just enough to get by – but over and above what we need, expect, or deserve friends.

Because God wants to demonstrate his lavish, extravagant grace to us to help us truly understand and experience the depth of His grace and love and have that transform us.

“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)

So we need to claim what God is saying to us in this verse and apply it to where we are at in life and what we are dealing with right now...this morning

Are you struggling to believe that God is good? Are you battling through tough circumstances, facing an illness?

Are you in need financially, are you looking for work? Are you seeking direction for where you should be going with your life or wondering what the future has in store for you...?

Then hear this verse as a reassurance that whatever you might be going through right now, God has not forgotten about you – He has a plan for your life... He will prosper you abundantly – and that's a promise.

Put your trust in the extravagant heart of God, have confidence in His desire and ability to bless you, and don't be afraid to ask for more than what you need – because friends, this morning God want you to know – He is going to prosper you. Just wait and see... Amen.