

Thanking God for His Plan

Last Sunday you were so kind as to sing happy birthday to Clarence and Barbara and me. So I wanted to tell you about one of the things that my son, John, gave me for my birthday. He knows that I am a history buff, and we both like WWII history, so he bought me a fairly in depth magazine about secret Nazi aircraft that were being planned in the waning years of the war in a last ditch effort by Hitler to stave off defeat. And this magazine had page after page showing photos and actual designs of these wonder weapons that the Nazis had drawn and planned to put into production. Many of these airplane designs looked much like jet fighters and bombers of today that could have wreaked unspeakable terror and death upon the Allied forces. And the actual drawings and blueprints were shown right in the pages of that magazine. How could anyone have ever overcome these weapons of war that had been so carefully planned by Germany if they had been put into production? And that was the evil plan that Hitler had placed his last hopes on. There is a verse in the Book of Psalms that seems to fit Hitler, and those like him, to a tee—it says: “Here now is the man who did not make God his stronghold but trusted in his great wealth and grew strong by destroying others!” Psalm 52:7 (NIV) And this verse tells us of the folly of turning our backs on God’s plan and instead trusting in the plans and designs of evil men and nations—that is always a bad plan no matter how powerful they seem to be.

But, throughout world history hasn’t that always been the case? Hasn’t mankind always been confronted with the choice of either following God’s plan for life or following the plans of Satan? Solomon in the Book of Ecclesiastes said that “there is nothing new under the sun.”¹ In other words, the same terrible choices that faced people back in Hitler’s day are the same choices we face today—the faces of the people making those choices change over time, but the choices are largely the same. In fact, they are the same choices that have always existed right on from the time Man was created to modern times. And God’s Word gives us so many examples of this.

In this regard, consider the choices that faced King Hezekiah of Judah made back in the 8th century B.C. when the Assyrian army came pressing upon Jerusalem and demanded him to turn his back on God and to submit to them. The Assyrians were a cruel and militaristic people and their army was massive—hardly anyone in the ancient Middle East appeared to be any match for them. And if they ever showed up knocking on the gates of your city, you’d know that it wasn’t Avon calling. They’d deliver to you the bluntest, most arrogant message you could ever imagine and it would be laced with psychological propaganda to make you doubt your own political leaders, and especially to make you abandon any religious convictions that you might hold to. And that’s the kind of message the Assyrian

King, Sennacherib, sent to the people of Jerusalem, and ultimately to King Hezekiah, when he sent out his Assyrian chief of staff to deliver just such a message. 2 Kings 18 describes all of this: ²⁸ “Then the chief of staff stood and shouted in Hebrew to the people on the wall, ‘Listen to this message from the great king of Assyria!’ ²⁹ This is what the king says: Don’t let Hezekiah deceive you. He will never be able to rescue you from my power. ³⁰ Don’t let him fool you into trusting in the LORD by saying, ‘The LORD will surely rescue us. This city will never fall into the hands of the Assyrian king!’ ³¹ “Don’t listen to Hezekiah! These are the terms the king of Assyria is offering: [Now listen to how good and pleasing the Assyrian chief of staff tries to make his king’s plan sound—he says that his king has the following plan:] Make peace with me—open the gates and come out. Then each of you can continue eating from your own grapevine and fig tree and drinking from your own well. ³² Then I will arrange to take you to another land like this one—a land of grain and new wine, bread and vineyards, olive groves and honey. Choose life instead of death! “Don’t listen to Hezekiah when he tries to mislead you by saying, ‘The LORD will rescue us!’ ³³ Have the gods of any other nations ever saved their people from the king of Assyria?” 2 Kings 18:28-33 (NLT2)

What an arrogant and wicked message to spread, when anyone directs someone else not to trust in the One True God! And yet, that is the major thrust of this message from this high ranking Assyrian officer. Of course, he was not only a messenger of woe from an earthly king, but like so many before and since him, he was acting as a high ranking official of Satan as well—because what he was spouting off has always been Satan’s message. In the Garden of Eden, in the form of a serpent, Satan gave Adam and Eve that same false message—**“Don’t trust God, trust me! I will give you an earthly land of milk and honey,”** Satan lies. Then he loves to tell the Great Lie: **“I will give you life, not death.”** Adam and Eve took the bait and unwittingly chose death over life.

And now Satan’s message confronted King Hezekiah. Satan’s message also deceptively offered **“life instead of death”**—but death is what lurked behind the scenes if Satan’s offer were accepted. So what would Hezekiah do? It was evident to everyone there in Jerusalem that Hezekiah lacked sufficient military forces to withstand the impending Assyrian onslaught. Hezekiah had no available allies to call upon in the form of other nations to rescue him and his city. What option did he have? Well, he had the same option that you and I have whatever the odds may be. He had the option of turning to, and trusting in, God. As the story goes on it tells us that Hezekiah put on sackcloth and went into God’s Temple. And then he sent some of his royal court officials along with the leading priests—all wearing sackcloth—to the Prophet Isaiah to inquire of him what God wanted them to do. And God told Isaiah to relay this message to Hezekiah, and this is what happened next: ⁵ After King Hezekiah’s officials

delivered the king's message to Isaiah, ⁶ the prophet replied, "Say to your master, 'This is what the LORD says: Do not be disturbed by this blasphemous speech against Me from the Assyrian king's messengers. ⁷ Listen! I myself will move against him, and the king will receive a message that he is needed at home. So he will return to his land, where I will have him killed with a sword.'" 2 Kings 19:5-7 (NLT2)

So, Hezekiah listened to this message. He couldn't see how things would play out and the Assyrian threat still appeared as threatening and as real as ever. And, yet he trusted God's message. And so Hezekiah stood firm. And sure enough, the Assyrian King received his own message from back at home informing him that the King of Ethiopia had attacked and he'd better return right away to defeat this menace to Assyrian security. And so the Assyrians did depart from Jerusalem just as God had said they would. But before they left, the Assyrian King sent another message, this time in a letter addressed specifically to Hezekiah, with even more blasphemous threats than before, and this is what the letter said: ¹⁰ "This message is for King Hezekiah of Judah. Don't let your God, in whom you trust, deceive you with promises that Jerusalem will not be captured by the king of Assyria. ¹¹ You know perfectly well what the kings of Assyria have done wherever they have gone. They have completely destroyed everyone who stood in their way! Why should you be any different?" 2 Kings 19:10-11 (NLT2)

Well, this sounded pretty terrible. What could Hezekiah do with such awful news as that? He did what God wants us to do in such times. God wants us to lay down our troubles before Him in prayer. And so Hezekiah took this ugly message to the Temple and laid it before the Lord and prayed, acknowledging the Lord as the One True God and concluded by saying: ¹⁷ "It is true, LORD, that the kings of Assyria have destroyed all these nations. ¹⁸ And they have thrown the gods of these nations into the fire and burned them. But of course the Assyrians could destroy them! They were not gods at all—only idols of wood and stone shaped by human hands. ¹⁹ Now, O LORD our God, rescue us from his power; then all the kingdoms of the earth will know that you alone, O LORD, are God." 2 Kings 19:17-19 (NLT2)

And God heard this prayer and sent the Prophet Isaiah back to Hezekiah with an extended response that assured him that He, God Himself, would take care of the great Assyrian army. Now I am not going to read that entire response, as inspiring as it is, and I invite you to read it later, then take the time to really think about. But, I want you to notice one particular part of what God had to say through the Prophet Isaiah because it is so very important. And it appears in verse 25 of 2 Kings 19, and the message from God was this: "But have you not heard? I decided this long ago. Long ago **I PLANNED IT, AND NOW I AM MAKING IT HAPPEN.**" 2 Kings 19:25 (NLT2)

God is declaring to King Hezekiah that there is nothing to worry about because everything in the course of human history is moving along in an unalterable and decisive plan that He, God Himself, had set in motion long ago when He first laid the foundations of the universe. And there will always be many evil people populating the earth during every age who will rail against God's plan because they are inspired by Satan to try to keep you away from the goal of God's plan. If we had to sum up the goal of God's plan in one word, what would that word be? That one word would be "SALVATION"—the opportunity of salvation for all of those who trust in God to see His plan through. And if you were to sum up the instrument of that plan of SALVATION in the name of one person, who would that person be? Well, that person has many names. This very same Isaiah who delivered God's message to a besieged Hezekiah, tells us His names in a passage that is very familiar this time of year as we approach Christmas. Isaiah proclaims: ⁶ "For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this." Isaiah 9:6-7 (NKJV) Who is this person? He is JESUS CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD—100% divine and 100% human.

Under God's plan, Jesus is our one and only hope of salvation. He is our one and only hope of life—eternal life, that is—in a world led by Satan singing out a false message. The reality is that Satan's message leads to eternal death and not to a land of milk and honey, but in a wretched place marked by fire and brimstone.² Hezekiah didn't listen to Satan's enticing message. But, did his decision pay off? Was God true to His plan for Hezekiah and His people? Well, yes—Of course! God is always faithful to those who are faithful to Him.

History records that the Assyrian King did eventually withdraw from Jerusalem. God's Word that we just read explains that the approach of the Ethiopian army, led by a man who would later become the Pharaoh of Egypt³, caused the Assyrians to retreat to defend their own border. Now, as it turns out, these same Assyrians apparently returned with a vast army of 185,000 soldiers. But that didn't matter. God's plan, as always, was still in effect. And how do we know that? We know that because 2 Kings 19 goes on and explains: [And God said:] ³⁴ "For my own honor and for the sake of my servant David, I will defend this city and protect it." ³⁵ That night the angel of the LORD went out to the Assyrian camp and killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. When the surviving Assyrians woke up the next morning, they found corpses everywhere. ³⁶ Then King Sennacherib of Assyria broke camp and returned to his own land. He went home to his capital of Nineveh and stayed there." 2 Kings 19:34-36 (NLT2)

Some Biblical scholars will point to references of ancient Greek historians who recounted a military disaster of this proportion befalling the Assyrian army. These historians speculate that such massive death must have come as the result of some kind of plague that was carried by the mice that so often gathered in large army encampments.⁴ Such speculation, however, misses the point—here the hand of God was clearly at work implementing His plan in world history by whatever means He chose to use—whether it be from mice or from the sword of the Angel of Death.⁵

You see, the Assyrian King had a plan—he wanted to take the City of Jerusalem and scatter God’s people to the wind. Hitler had a plan, but his evil plans were for the destruction of the Jewish people—he wanted to scatter them as well, but the awful reality was that what he wanted to scatter were there ashes to the wind. Satan has a plan. His plan is to lie to you and to actually murder you in the eternal sense.⁶ And to do this, Satan plans on convincing you that you are unworthy, and so sinful that God could never take you back into His fold. Ah, but don’t listen to him. Don’t be deceived because God has a plan and it will never fail. God’s plan is always in your best interests and is fully designed to give you a future in the hope of eternal life in His Kingdom.⁷ And God’s plans will not be left unfinished. Unlike Hitler, who left reams of plans and designs of his wonder weapons wholly uncompleted, God’s promise is unwavering, and what He starts, He finishes. God promises to us: “What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do.” Isaiah 46:11 (NIV)

Yes, King Sennacherib’s plans to capture Jerusalem were foiled by the hand of God because the plans of this arrogant Assyrian were contrary to God’s will. Don’t ever be so arrogant or deceived as to take up such foolish plans as that. And, so many of those blueprints for Hitler’s jet airplanes remained unfinished—don’t let the same be true of God’s plan for your salvation. And we need to remember that as we approach Thanksgiving. Remember to thank God for His plan—the one that He formulated from the beginning of time⁸—the plan by which He sent His only begotten Son, whose birth we’ll soon be celebrating, to die on a Cross for your sins and mine. Thank God for the plan that He presents to you—the one that offers true life. Do you know the only thing that King Sennacherib’s chief of staff got right when he cried out his taunts while standing there at the gates of Jerusalem? The only part that he got right was when he told the people to “choose life, not death”. The problem was he got those two choices all mixed up because whenever anyone thinks that life is gained by turning away from God, then they’ve accepted the wrong plan.

Choose life—choose Jesus. ***His Plan and His Way*** offers the only true plan leading to eternal life. Jesus said: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” John 14:6 (NIV) Christ is the way to Life. Satan is the way to death. Yeah—choose life! Choose the

plan by which ¹⁶ “God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” ¹⁷ For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.” [Ultimately, **that is** God’s Plan! He wants to save the world! Well, how does that Plan work? It’s actually pretty simple and works like this:] ¹⁸ “Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe [i.e. they adopt their own life plan apart from God—well, they stand:] “condemned already because [they have] not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.” [So how do we assess all of this? Well, we don’t have to assess it because Jesus does it for us. He tells us straight up:] ¹⁹ “This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.” John 3:16-19 (NIV) So many like plans of darkness and reject God’s Plan of Light through His Son Jesus Christ.

And that’s what King Sennacherib was—a lover of darkness, and not light. In the end, do you know how King Sennacherib’s plan turned out?—He was assassinated by the hands of his own sons. And what about Hitler?—Well his evil plan didn’t go so well either because in the end he died by his own hand. You see, bad plans make for bad endings. We need to thank God this coming Thanksgiving Day, and every day, that through the sacrifice of His Son, He made His Plan a reality for all sinners who repent, love God trust and obey. And so, we need to join with Isaiah in singing out in joyous shouts of thanksgiving: “O LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name, for in perfect faithfulness you have done marvelous things, things **PLANNED** long ago.” Isaiah 25:1 (NIV) If you haven’t already done so, my best advice to you is this: You need to get with God’s Plan before it’s too late.

Let us pray.

Forest Hill Baptist Church
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¹ Ecclesiastes 1:9 (NLT2) History merely repeats itself. It has all been done before. Nothing under the sun is truly new.

² Psalm 11:6 (NASB) Upon the wicked He will rain snares; Fire and brimstone and burning wind will be the portion of their cup.

³ New Living Translation Study Bible, fn 19:9, p. 718.)

⁴ August H. Konkel, *1 & 2 Kings: From biblical text...to contemporary life*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 603.

⁵ George Arthur Buttrick, ed., *Volume 3*, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1954), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 303.

⁶ John 8:44 (NASB) He [Satan] was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

⁷ Jeremiah 29:11 (HCSB) “For I know the plans I have for you”—This is the LORD’s declaration—“plans for your welfare, not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.”

⁸ Acts 2:23 (TEV) In accordance with His own plan God had already decided that Jesus would be handed over to you; and you killed him by letting sinful men crucify him.