
YOU CALL THAT A PLAN?

I've often said that there is one mistake I think GOD made.

- Now, I realize this is a pretty presumptuous thing for me to say.
 - Nevertheless, I think GOD made a big mistake leaving the church in the hands of people.

Last week's first lesson was the story of the first time human beings gave into the temptation to try to be like GOD.

- Actually, every time we reject GOD'S will and go our own way, we are committing the very same sin Adam and Eve did.
- Yet GOD trusted humankind—trusted us—with spreading the good news of JESUS CHRIST and bringing the kingdom of GOD closer.
 - All I have to say is, "GOD, YOU call that a plan?"

One of the most important conversations in the Bible is the one we heard in the Old Testament reading.

- This dialogue includes GOD'S plan for the world, and that it would be entrusted to a man called Abram.

Let's do a little study of this passage to better understand the scope of this plan.

v. 1 Abram's name means "exalted father."

- GOD would later change his name to Abraham meaning "father of many."
 - Now this guy is 75 years old, with no children and his wife is 65.
 - She's past child-bearing age but he's going to be the "father of many?"
 - GOD, YOU call that a plan?

In the same verse, the text says that "the LORD had said."

- GOD gave this instruction to leave his home country before. When he was still in Mesopotamia. And now he's in Haran.
- But he hasn't even reached the land that GOD had promised him.
- Yet, the words of the LORD remained clear in his mind:
 - He would go to a land the LORD would show him;
 - a land that GOD would give him.
- But is the promise of land enough?
 - What promise would convince you to leave your home and family and travel to a strange land?
 - (My grandparents left Denmark and came to homestead in South Dakota.)
 - But it seems that GOD'S promise of land was enough to convince Abram.
 - So, v. 4 tells us, he went as the LORD told him.

And there was more to GOD'S plan than just the promise of land.

- vv. 2 & 3 contain the rest of this plan

But we need to understand this plan in terms of a covenant.

- In a covenant, each party promises to do something.
- Sounds like a contract, but a covenant differs from a contract in that if one party fails to do their part, the other party still will.

In this covenant, GOD promises to do five things and Abram two.

GOD'S part is this:

1) I will make you into a great nation.

- Remember: from "exalted father" to "father of many."

2) I will bless you.

3) I will make your name great.

- How many of you know of Abraham? Sounds like a great name.

4) I will bless those who bless you.

5) I will curse those who curse you.

Abram's part is really belongs of all who believe:

1) You will be a blessing.

2) Through you all people will be blessed.

- Knowing human beings, I got ask, "YOU call that a plan?"

But then, consider that JESUS is a descendant of Abram.

- And through JESUS, salvation comes to who? All people.

- A blessing indeed.

This however, is not the whole of GOD'S blessing to which GOD'S followers are called.

- There is more that GOD wants us to do that all people might be blessed.

In the LORD'S Prayer, we speak the words, "THY Kingdom come, THY will be done."

- This isn't just something we are asking GOD to do.

- It is a commitment that we say we will work to make happen.

- But look around.

- Is this work completed?

- Is there more to be done?

Martin Luther in his Small Catechism explained that part of the LORD'S Prayer this way:

- "GOD'S Kingdom will surely come without our prayer for it; but we ask in this prayer that it will come to us."

- Our problem is that we trust too much that GOD will just do the job.

- We forget how important it is for us to be involved in bringing GOD'S Kingdom.

German theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, wrote that "the church is only the church when it exists for others."

- GOD'S plan includes not only a different kind of world for us (THY Kingdom come),

- but also, an outward looking church to make that happen for others (THY will be done).

Certainly, GOD can accomplish the work of the Kingdom alone.

- But our GOD, who desires relationship with us, wants us to be a part of this Kingdom work.

- GOD wants people who desire to be an ally with GOD.

- When we bring someone to church who has no relationship with the LORD, GOD'S Kingdom comes closer.

- When we provide support for the hungry or the homeless, GOD'S Kingdom come nearer.

- When we pray each day for the rescue of earthquake victims or the safety of school children,

- when we pray that others might better know the love and mercy of JESUS, GOD'S Kingdom comes.

Even though GOD can do this without us, GOD prefers not to work alone.

- Our GOD is a GOD of relationship who wants to love us into CHRIST'S own image so that we become part of GOD'S plan.
-

Ruben Durand, an ELCA Director of Mission Outreach, puts it this way:

- "GOD'S going to do what GOD'S going to do.
 - The only question is, 'Are we going to be part of it or not?'"
-

GOD'S plan says, "I will bless you."

- GOD keeps GOD'S part of that covenant by sending JESUS.
 - JESUS died to free us from sin, guilt, and fear.
 - Because we no longer carry these burdens, we are free to act, to be part of what GOD is doing in the world.

The freedom to act is the foundation of the Church.

- A congregation is a group of people gathered together by their common claim to GOD'S freedom,
 - and who desire to respond to that freedom by being useful to GOD.
-

GOD'S plan says, "I will bless you," and so GOD sends JESUS.

- GOD'S plan says, "I will bless you so that you can be a blessing."
- GOD'S plan says, "Go to the land that I will show you and I will make you a great nation,
 - so that all the people of the earth will be blessed."

To accomplish this plan, GOD chooses Abram, and David, and Peter, and Paul, and us.

- GOD, YOU call that a plan?
 - Yes, and it seems to be a pretty good plan after all!