

Series: "May the Church Be the Church"

Sermon: "Plans"

Text: Proverbs 6:6-8; 19:21; James 4:13-17; Psalm 20:1-20 Genesis 22:6-10

RGGJR/FBCCS/2-7-21 **UNEDITED**

- They pick up our trash and now also, our recycling on Friday morning. If I don't PLAN for it, I sometimes forget to roll the bins out on time. This lack of planning then complicates my life. The bins are so noisy it feels like I'm going to wake up the whole neighborhood when I try to roll them out late on Thursday night. Sometimes, when I haven't planned for it, I decide it is best to get up very early on Friday morning. I hate losing sleep because I haven't planned for garbage collection.
- Then sometimes I do plan. The bins are rolled out to the curb on time. I've done everything right. I anticipate the outcome of my trash being collected so my bins will be empty for the coming week. Then, in spite of my best-laid disposal plans, it snows and I get an email around 10 on Friday that says, "Due to the bad weather, my service will be one day late."
- Hidden in this little trashy scenario is a little illustrative question. Am I really in *control* of my garbage collection. It feels as if I am. Let's say I make my plan and carry it out perfectly putting the bins out on time on Thursday. When I follow that plan of mine, it gives me a sense that I am in control of the whole garbage collection process. However, does it actually ensure the pickup will happen?
- Why not? Because I don't know everything. For example, I don't know for sure that it will snow so much my service is cancelled. And, because, I don't control everything, like the weather, I can't keep it from snowing at the wrong time for my garbage collection plan to work.
- Still, if I'm honest, when I do plan, it does make me feel a bit like the god-of-garbage. It makes me feel in control. The ultimate reality is I am not truly in control. I simply feel that way and I like it!

Series: "May the Church Be the Church"

Sermon: "Plans"

Text: Proverbs 6:6-8; 19:21; James 4:13-17; Psalm 20:1-20 Genesis 22:6-10

RGJJR/FBCCS/2-7-21 **UNEDITED**

- Thankfully, the world will not end if I fail to plan or my plan fails when it comes to garbage collection. You don't have to feel sorry for me that I have such a great responsibility on my shoulders for getting the garbage right.
- Judged pragmatically by how often it seems to work, my little "plan" illustration will break down. That's ok. I am not interested at all in the causation of garbage collection. I am very interested in that *inkling* of a feeling—false as it is—that I ***totally control*** it.
- *I inherited that feeling from my mother*—not a feeling about garbage control and not from my *physical* mother. I inherited the feeling of my *control* from my "mother" Eve. She added it to the flesh of the human family by deciding she would control the acquisition of the knowledge of *Good and Evil* with her own *plan* to eat from the tree without God.
- It is interesting to me that what we think of as human ***plans*** very often are mixed up with our feelings of human ***control***.
- In some circumstances, we humans very easily move to the conclusion that if we just have a *plan*, we then have things *under our control*. As I said, I don't want to talk about garbage collection. I want to talk about ***human plans*** and ***human control***.
- Those of you who were hoping to hear the topic I announced as a possibility last Sunday, please forgive me for putting that topic off at least for this week.
- Over the last two months, many of you have participated in what were called "*Elder Zoom Meetings*." I chose not to be a direct part of those meetings because I often talk too much. It was more beneficial to listen in order to hear from some of you. I have watched the recordings and read nearly all of the email responses to the questions you were asked. Thank you for the energy put into that.

Series: "May the Church Be the Church"

Sermon: "Plans"

Text: Proverbs 6:6-8; 19:21; James 4:13-17; Psalm 20:1-20 Genesis 22:6-10

RGJR/FBCCS/2-7-21 **UNEDITED**

- From watching and reading, I have a sense of the *good* that is in your hearts for God and for FBC. Thank you for that too. Keep praying and keep thinking. Keep asking God to be glorified by us as Jesus' church.
- From watching and reading I also have a sense that we sometimes think the most important thing for us to do right now as a church is to ***make our plan***. Depending on how we see human plans in relationship to human control that could be a good thing or a harmful thing for our body.
- Remember, I am operating from the personal conclusion that, because of our mother Eve, it is a very easy thing for humans to slip into the mode of human plans as a means of human control. This does not happen always. However, this happens often, if we fail to stay alert to the potential connection and to the drive in all us for a sense of control.
- So, human "plans"—let's talk about them a bit.
- As a committed hoarder, I still have a big box full of year long agendas from many years ago called "Franklin Planners." These planners were specially designed to motivate me to plan down to the small details of every day. The hardworking Mormon fellows who designed this planning system named it after Benjamin Franklin because he was one human who certainly believed in human planning.
- Franklin was supposed to have made the pithy, balanced statement about planning that goes, "***If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail.***" Reading Franklin's writings, it is clear, that in some way, Franklin had concluded ***planning*** was essential to ***controlling*** for what he would have defined as ***success*** in life.
- When you hear that memorable statement is it easy for you to keep from making the logical leap to the antithesis? Franklin seems to

have done this. That would be, "***If you plan you will not fail.***" Of course when I say it that coldly and boldly in the context of this sermon presentation, you probably recognize the potential fallacy. ***We don't control everything.*** Sometimes it *snows* on garbage day.

- However, I raise Franklin's humanistic truism because I think so many of us have his idea buried deep in our values. It is buried there and it even impacts how we think about *spiritual* endeavors on God's mission—how we think about being the church. If we humanly plan correctly—humanly plan well enough—we will then expect to *succeed* for God however it is that we are defining that success.
- Spiritually, yet still very concretely, we might suspect the OT book of *Proverbs* has some biblical things to say about plans. We would be right. I like the picturesque reference in *Proverbs* 6 about the ant. It is addressed to sluggards, so it is specifically about laziness, but it portrays the ant as a planner who has things figured out in advance.
- ***Go to the ant, you sluggard;
consider its ways and be wise!***
***⁷ It has no commander,
no overseer or ruler,
⁸ yet it stores its provisions in summer
and gathers its food at harvest.***
- Because the ant plans, it doesn't run out of ant food.
- Yet, as I scanned *Proverbs*, I concluded there are some other verses about plans that suggest one shouldn't build a formula that directly ties successful live to human or "ant" planning.
- For example *Proverbs* 19:21 is typical of what other wisdom proverbs from God have to say about human planning: ***Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.*** In other

words, ultimately humans are not in control even if they would like to be. Planning does not bring control even if it feels like it does.

- Humans may plan, but God controls. That is ultimately true for the plans of ants as well. Humans plan, but God controls. This is where human planning can so easily go off the rails. It happens when we have within us, from our ancient, antediluvian mom a sense that **our** planning gives us control. And, if we can have control, it is not too big a step for our flesh to conclude, we don't need God, or at least, we don't need God as much using this planning this equation.
"That's ok God. We have a plan and everything is under control!"
- James brings this idea forward to the NT for us in another rather concrete example. In *James 4:13-17* as he writes to believers asking them to submit to God in their lives he says, "¹³ **Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money."** (HUMAN PLANNING) ¹⁴ **Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.** ¹⁵ **Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."** ¹⁶ **As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil.** ¹⁷ **If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.**
- Go just one-step deeper than the surface here and ask yourself, "What are they boasting about?" It is not simply boasting that they have a plan. It is boasting that they have a plan that gives them **control** of this aspect of their lives. The evil, arrogance of this boasting, as James puts it, is that their sense of control. In reality, it is no more than a vanishing mist like the rest of their lives. In other

words, it is not substantially real! They are not in control! They want to be in control—they like the feeling of being in control because their antediluvian mama taught them that, BUT they are not!

- Let me try to convince you that human planning for feeling in control is a more common trap than we might realize. It is so common, in fact, we often don't realize we are making plans to feel in control.
- Of course, I have already mentioned numerous times our mother Eve who planned to eat and share as a step to her control of life without God. [BTW: Let's put it in the open. Who tempted her to do that? Might that same tempter still use that same strategy now?]
- Let me cite just a few more examples. Maybe the one I love the most and I can't even tell the story the way one pastor told it that makes it stick in my head, was a planning experience of the Father of Faith.
- *Abraham, you shall be the father of many nations—of uncountable offspring numbering like the stars in the sky. Great God! Thank you. I believe you and trust you to make that happen....God, lots of time has passed since your promise. Sarah can't seem to get pregnant. I can't see how you will make this happen. God? Are you there? God, we have a good human plan to make your good promise a success. We need to make something successful happen. We need to take **control** of this so-far failure. Hagar, come her. We have a plan that will glorify God. We will take control and make his promise come true.*
- Did the plan work? Well, yes, by a human earthly measure. A child was indeed born. Did it glorify God? Absolutely not! Abraham and Sarah made a plan to take control from God because they couldn't see and know everything God could see and know. That is, of course a big problem with our human plans.

Series: "May the Church Be the Church"

Sermon: "Plans"

Text: Proverbs 6:6-8; 19:21; James 4:13-17; Psalm 20:1-20 Genesis 22:6-10

RGGJR/FBCCS/2-7-21 **UNEDITED**

- And, please note here, very often our human plans are made with the intent of *helping* God's *good* to happen. We planners think we are doing God's work for his glory. We are often de-glorifying God because our plans are really about feeling in control.
- Abraham passed this planning-to-control-things gene on to his family. His grandson Jacob was the ultimate planner—we even call him a "schemer" sometimes—the ultimate planner to make God's will come true. He seized control over and over again and again. For example, his plan was to get what God had promised by cheating Esau and deceiving his father Isaac.
- The chickens of all of Jacob's human planning, and sense of control it brought, were about to come home to roost many years later. He certainly had some success by worldly standards through his planning to control. Now though, his brother Esau would likely kill him. When he was about to meet up with Esau on the other side of the Jabbok what did he do? He planned to try to control the situation. He sent gifts and people and animals on ahead. His plan was to placate and thus control his brother's anger.
- On the other side of the Jabbok River Jacob remained alone. His propensity to plan in order to control had to be broken if he was going truly to serve God. God wrestled with him in the dirt and Jacob finally got the point and wouldn't let go. "*My plans **don't** truly give me control. Only God is in control of the blessing.*"
- God could then bless him with a reminder of weakness—a limp—a reminder that Jacob's plans were not really controlling anything. The story concludes by God honoring Jacob with the name "Israel." Look it up. The name commemorates that Israel would be a **fighter**—as Jacob had wrestled long in the dirt with God. However, ultimately

Series: "May the Church Be the Church"

Sermon: "Plans"

Text: Proverbs 6:6-8; 19:21; James 4:13-17; Psalm 20:1-20 Genesis 22:6-10

RGGJR/FBCCS/2-7-21 **UNEDITED**

that fighter prevailed by loosing. He lost but now knew *his* human plans were not what brought control and success to God's will. Only God, his opponent that night on the riverbank, was truly in control.

- God wants his people to be strong, stubborn, fighters. But God does not want his people to fight by means of their human plans so that they might feel in control when they are not. Only He is! This is a confusing point of temptation for all the sons and daughters of Eve.
- Later, when Israel had grown into a nation, they looked around at the surrounding nations who didn't even know their God and what they saw inspired a plan for the sake of feeling in control. *God, our plan calls for a human king because we see that that will make us a success like these nations without you seem to be a success to us.*
- God asked if they were sure and explained through his prophet that human kings are not a good plan because they are fallible, can't see everything and usually trying to be in control. *Wouldn't it be better if you, Israel, just let **me** be your king because I am actually in control anyway? No? Ok, here is the king according your plan.* What a mess!
- *Psalm 20* was written by David, one of the first of those Israelite, human kings who were part of the human plan to have control as their godless neighbors had. Listen to the wisdom of God through David in that psalm. He puts human plans in their right place—*theologically* and *theoretically*. I say "*theoretically*," because the kings and the people of Israel rarely were able to separate human plans from human control. The temptation was too much for them. They had inherited that propensity from their mother just as we have. **READ Psalm 20:1-20**
- Ah, so, we can indeed make plans and pray for success! **Yes**, we can. As long as we remember the punch line in verse 7: "**...but we trust in**

the LORD." Israel's experience was that very often, *human* plans so easily led to trust in *human* control. That is my frequent experience in my own life and my experience with many ministries I have seen as well. We all inherited that tempting propensity from "mom."

- Lately, I have been lovingly hassling us as a Body by talking about what I see as a gracious time of **reset** by God for his church in our western culture. The truth is, **resets** most often come to God's people when they have **forgotten whom to trust—forgotten who is truly in control**. They often come when God's people have been trusting their human plans because human plans feel like human control and we tend to like that feeling.
- Can humans plan? Yes. Can we do it in a godly way? Yes. Is it easy for us to plan in a godly way? I would say it is not. I would say unless we are vigilant and maybe even very zealous to guard the motives of our hearts when it comes to humans plans, we easily can fall into trusting our plans because they can give a wonderful sense of being in control of the future and we naturally like that feeling.
- We live in a western culture that has no problem trusting human plans because they reject trusting God. The whole world around us is designed to reward what seem to be good planners because they have found a way to control life without God. Pragmatic values provide the culture with proof that human plans are sufficient. When these plans fail, humans often lie to themselves and others about the reality so they can maintain that beloved feeling of control.
- It would be easy for us, God's people—the church of Jesus, just as it was for Israel and their plan for a king, to look around us at the world and decide to do it their way trusting what they trust—their plans—their sense of control without God.

Series: "May the Church Be the Church"

Sermon: "Plans"

Text: Proverbs 6:6-8; 19:21; James 4:13-17; Psalm 20:1-20 Genesis 22:6-10

RGJR/FBCCS/2-7-21 **UNEDITED**

- We are involved in a real estate transaction. We may be selling this facility soon. Should we all try to block out of our heads what things might look like in the future because thinking ahead about it might lead to a **plan** and that could be evil? No, that is not what I am saying.
- Look, if God sells this building and, in His plan, God gives us another building, my plan would be that it has toilets, a great kitchen and maybe even much better internet access. But, I am not imagining those things and planning a way to get them because they are what I want.
- Then what am I saying? This reset is not given to us by God's grace so we can change an address, have a different view out of the windows and quickly and automatically just keep on with whatever human plans it is that we have as our idea of a church.
- This reset is a gift that says **Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.** This reset says: **Some trust in chariots and others in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.**
- I believe this **reset** is a time for us to **wrestle** with God and to cling to him refusing to let go until we know that he knows that we know he knows that we know that he knows we know **He alone** is the source of the blessing we desperately need more than anything we dream we need. **His** plan is what matters. **He** is the only one who really, actually, truly, has control!
- This is why "**your elders**," as they often introduce themselves, both on Sundays and in all-church-emails, keep asking you to pray for want can seem like *nebulous* things—*non-concrete* things when some of you feel like they ought instead to have a concrete plan for concrete and carpet color.

Series: "May the Church Be the Church"

Sermon: "Plans"

Text: Proverbs 6:6-8; 19:21; James 4:13-17; Psalm 20:1-20 Genesis 22:6-10

RGGJR/FBCCS/2-7-21 **UNEDITED**

- I get your impatience. I do get it! Mary and I may both bust if we don't close on this real estate deal or do away with the pending deal by the end of this month as we have expected we would. We are tired of not knowing—tired of of *wrestling in the dirt with God*—of not putting OUR plan in place to get things under control! BUT, you get the point of why God wrestled Jacob all night. Sometimes we have to wrestle all night to **give up our plans**, which actually means to **give up our control!**
- I get it! But I believe God has come down to wrestle in the dirt with us, as unseemly as that may be for the deity, because he loves us and he is giving us a special opportunity to grow for his mission ahead in a world we just cannot foresee and certainly cannot control!
- Ben Franklin, considered a wise man by worldly standards, said, "**If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail.**" I suspect he was speaking from a worldly perspective that ultimately meant, "**If you fail to plan your human plans, you are letting things get out of your control.**" We know they are never really under our control. That is a *vaporous, empty* idea of the world around us attempting to live life without the need for God.
- Another story of Abraham will not leave my mind in this message. It tells me, that as difficult as Jacob's struggle to "let go" by clinging to God, there may be even more painful lessons needed in shaking our "mother's" propensity to want to control her own destiny.
- When God said Abraham, I want you to take Isaac up Mount Moriah and kill him as an offering to me, I don't know of a more difficult test of who was in control—whose plans were being trusted.
- In that miraculous son were intertwined the plans of Abraham and God. God wanted to make sure whose plans for the boy were in play.

- The Hagar incident was nothing compared to this. Saying goodbye to Hagar and their son Ishmael, as they were sent into the wilderness, didn't mean things would be over for them from a human perspective. Rather, it meant that things would be back on track—back in line with God's plan rather than Abraham's and Hagar and Ishmael could still live.
- Now, killing the promised seed made absolutely no sense in any human generated plan Abraham could conceive. Killing the promised seed, from a human perspective could only mean things were out of control to see the promise fulfilled. Don't you think Abraham felt the world was out of control as he climbed that hill without knowing a human plan that would work to control the situation and bring success—don't you? I do.
- But God said, "**Trust me.**" This implied God had a plan that could not be seen by any mere human planner—a perfect, glorious plan only God could make but a plan unknown to a human being who would have liked to feel some control.
- Genesis 22 beginning in verse 6 tells this part of the story...
- ***6 Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac. He himself carried the fire and the sacrificial knife, and the two of them walked on together. 7Then Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" "Here I am, my son," he replied. "The fire and the wood are here," said Isaac, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"***
- ***What was Isaac asking? "Dad, what's the PLAN??"***
- ***8 Abraham answered, "God Himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two walked on together. 9When they arrived at the place God had designated, Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood. He bound his son Isaac and***

Series: "May the Church Be the Church"

Sermon: "Plans"

Text: Proverbs 6:6-8; 19:21; James 4:13-17; Psalm 20:1-20 Genesis 22:6-10

RGJR/FBCCS/2-7-21 **UNEDITED**

placed him on the altar, atop the wood. 10Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son.

- ***The answer?*** "Son, **God** has the perfect plan. We will just need to cling to him and keep on going up the hill."
- "Raleigh—Elders, what's the PLAN for FBC??" "As scary as it may seem, as out of control as it might feel, I can assure you that God has the perfect plan and God is in control as long as we don't try to take control."
- I believe, both as people and as a church, we must continue to cling to Him wrestling Him in our unknowing of the plan. And, we must climb a bit more up the hill where, as far as we can tell, our human plans are meant to die as a strange, unexpected sacrifice to God.