

What Feel-Good Preachers Get Wrong on Sundays

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Whether it's on the radio, television, internet or at church, we often hear that God has a wonderful plan for our life. But as Ray Comfort rightly notes, “The preacher promises a bed of roses for those who come to Christ, but those who are in Christ are evidently sitting on a painful bed of thorns.”

This may explain why a very high percent of those raised in Christian homes leave the faith, and why many others show no evidence of faith.

There are a large number of false conversions because many base their decision to follow Christ on having a wonderful life. We have turned salvation into an easy path rather than a narrow road. We've made Jesus a butler rather than a King. We want the cross light, the road easy and the burdens lifted.

Many promise a problem-free faith, yet we deal with a plethora of problems on a weekly basis. Sadly, unrealistic expectations about God can lead to depression and despair.

How do we reconcile this idea of a wonderful life with the Christian couple killed by a Pakistani mob? What do you tell the Christian family who loses both children within a decade? Or the parents who receive news that their 3-year-old has leukemia? What about the disciples?—eleven of the twelve were martyred.

Here is the key: Our relationship with God does not hinge on unanswered prayers, trials, difficulties and persecution; it hinges on who He is. He is our foundation in the midst of the

storm. He is our peace in the midst of fear. He is our comfort in the midst of anxiety.

The gospel is a message of hope and redemption. It offers God's grace through our trials, as well as peace that surpasses all understanding. We never find inner peace until we have peace with God.

For the Christian, it's not the absence of the storm, but a deep inner peace amidst the storm in light of an eternal plan that keeps us secure. We are greatly remiss if we fail to teach this balance.

Trying times are not intended to break us down but to build us up. The only way to build such qualities as love, joy, peace, humility and patience is to be confronted with situations that require love, joy, peace, humility and patience. How do we develop patience if we're not tested? How do we develop forgiveness if we are never wronged? How do we develop humility if we're never humbled? Even Christ "learned obedience through the things that He suffered" (Heb. 5:8b).

Please don't misunderstand: God blesses His people. We should pray for, enjoy and encourage His blessings. But a wonderful, comfortable life is not always a blessing; the presence and power of God in our lives is: "The Lord will give strength to His people; the Lord will bless His people with peace" (Ps. 29:11). Strength in the midst of the storm is a true blessing. Paul's motto was, "I've learned to be content in all things."

In addition to many saying that the Christian life can be problem-free, many misquote Scriptures to fit their ideology. For example, Jeremiah 29:11 is often misapplied: "For I know the plans that I have for you," says the Lord, plans for peace and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope." Granted, this Scripture is an encouragement. We know that God is sovereign; He's in control. I reflect on this verse often, but it must be balanced with other Scriptures that speak of

persecution, difficulties and challenges.

In context, Jeremiah is writing to the nation of Israel who was defeated and living in exile (not a wonderful plan from their current perspective). The proceeding verse, Jeremiah 29:10, says that the return from captivity will occur “when seventy years have been completed for Babylon.” In other words, God is promising His people that after 70 years in exile He will bring them back to the land. It’s a message of future hope, not an easy life.

What if promotional material for the Navy SEALs read, “Limited time to be stationed in Hawaii. Free luaus, snorkeling and cruises with nightly excursions—all paid for by the United States Navy.” How many would jump at the opportunity? How many would be shocked, disappointed and disillusioned when they found out what really was involved? This is what we do when we fail to paint a life in Christ without a full spectrum of colors. God may have a wonderful life for you here, but if not, He does have a wonderful plan in light of eternity.

God ascribes to Himself names to identify His nature. We can take comfort in knowing that He is Jehovah Jireh our provider. He is El Shaddai—all-powerful; His sovereign control will never end. He is Jehovah Shalom—our peace in the midst of the storm. He is Jehovah Rohi—our Shepherd when we walk through the difficult valleys. He is Jehovah Nissi—our victory and our strength; He will not be defeated. He is Jehovah Tsidkenu—our righteousness; He provided the way of salvation through Christ alone.

Finally, He is Jehovah Shammah—He is there in the darkest times. He will never leave nor forsake you (see Deuteronomy 31:6). “I have told you these things so that in Me you may have peace. In this world you will have tribulation. But be of good cheer. I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Watch an important short clip here. {eo}