



The Story Of Salvation

NCTM Tuesday Night Studies 2010

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23. The Lead-Up to the Cross

Preaching on the day of Pentecost, Peter addressed the crowds with these words about the crucifixion of Jesus Christ:

²² “Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.²³

This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross...”

These words declare a double responsibility for the crucifixion of Jesus. There is the wickedness of human action, but over-ruling that is the purpose and foreknowledge of God. Human beings did their worst against God and His Son, and yet God’s purposes prevailed. As Geoff Bingham says,

God plans according to His will; man acts according to his own will, but this is what God uses to fulfil His plan.¹

Satan’s Evil Intention

It wasn’t just sinful human intention to destroy the Son of God: behind these wicked acts lay the prince of darkness himself. A number of times we see that Satan intended the destruction of the Son of God:

1. At his birth:

The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born. She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron sceptre. (Rev. 12:4b-5a)

This parallels with the attempt of Herod to find and destroy the one born to be king of Israel (Matt. 2:1-18).

2. At his temptation. Having failed in this attempt, Satan then

... left him until an opportune time. (Luke 4:13)

3. At various times in his ministry, when crowds sought to put Christ to death, or when “natural forces” rose up against him. (See Luke 4:28-30; 8:22-25.)

4. In particular, the Pharisees and Sadducees grew in their antipathy and hatred towards him, and their scheming grows and grows through the Gospel accounts. (See Luke 5:21, 30-39; 6:2, 9-11; 7:36-50; 11:14-16, 37-53 (esp. v. 54); 13:14-17; 14:1-24; 15:1-2; 16:14-15; 18:9-14; 19:39-40, 45-48 (esp. vv. 47-48); 20:1-8, 19, 26, 39, 45-47 [the whole chapter 20 is “declared war” between Jesus and the teachers and Pharisees].) Finally,

“Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve. And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the Temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus. They

¹ Geoffrey Bingham, *Salvation History* (NCPI:Blackwood, 1977, 2008), p. 71

were delighted and agreed to give him money. He consented, and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present.” (Luke 22:3-6)

In all these events we see an element to the story of salvation that has been largely under wraps until this time: that the kingdom of God is opposed by one who seeks to be king in His place and who opposes but uses humanity in that drive. Why “under wraps”? It may be that the nature of Satan’s work in all these things is simply imperceivable to sinful human beings. Certainly the clear statements of Scripture about the enslavement and bondage of human beings under Satan are highly offensive to those whom the Scripture say are just in that position (e.g. John 8:42-47; Eph. 2:1-3; Titus 3:3; Heb. 2:14-15.) The hidden-ness is simply blindness: just as much as we have been blinded by sin to the glory of God (Rom. 1:18-23), so we are also blinded and deceived about the work of the evil one. He has a vested interest in us not seeing the situation in which we find ourselves.

God’s Saving Intention: The Indispensability of the Cross

Yet, behind all the machinations and plotting of Satan, and of a human race in league with him, there stood the eternal purposes of God which had been made known in prophecy. The events of the cross (and the resurrection, ascension and glorification that followed) were all essential in the outworking of God’s salvation history. That the Son of God should suffer and die!—to human logic and reasoning it seems incredible that such a thing would further the saving purposes of God. Again it seems that the plan of God is pushed to the very edge, into a seemingly impossible situation.

From the Transfiguration to Last Supper

The events of the Transfiguration mark a definite turning point in Jesus’ ministry. From that point on,

As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus *resolutely* set out for Jerusalem. (Luke 9:51)

The Transfiguration was a preparation for what lay ahead of him. It was with a view to the Cross and Resurrection. The events of the Transfiguration were:

²⁸ About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. ²⁹ As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. ³⁰ Two men, Moses and Elijah, ³¹ appeared in glorious splendour, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfilment at Jerusalem. ³² Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. ^{33*} As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, “Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters— one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” (He did not know what he was saying.) ³⁴ While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. ³⁵ A voice came from the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.” ³⁶ When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves, and told no-one at that time what they had seen. (Luke 9:28-36)

Moses and Elijah represent the Law and the Prophets, and so as they speak with him about his coming *exodus* which he is to *accomplish* (not what simply will happen to him, but what he will do) in Jerusalem, we see that Jesus is here to fulfil all that has been anticipated in the prophecies and covenants of the Old Testament. The first exodus under Moses prefigured the great exodus, the saving of people from bondage and slavery to Satan, sin, and death into the freedom of the Father, obedience and life. The transfiguration glory is a “pre-glorification” of Jesus, a participation in the glorious

future for humanity that all he will do in Jerusalem will achieve. “He was transfigured that he might be disfigured, that we who are disfigured may be transfigured.”²

In the following chapters of Luke’s account, the intensity of the opposition grew (as we saw above.) When Jesus finally arrived in Jerusalem, he was hailed by the people as blessed, “the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” (Luke 19:38). But even this is “seen through” by Jesus who immediately sheds tears for the city (19:39-41-44), knowing that this enthusiasm is but like a morning mist that will disappear in the heat of day. Jesus affirmed his Messianic authority by immediately going to the Temple and cleansing it, driving out the money-changers and traffickers in sacrificial animals who had turned the place of prayer for the Gentiles into a market, “a den of robbers.”

The final discourses of Jesus in this last week prior to his crucifixion must have been very significant. We have seen already that he crystallised the innate opposition to him that was brewing by his very direct speech to the Pharisees, Sadducees, chief priests and teachers. By so crystallising this opposition he ensured that the necessary events that followed would indeed come to pass. (He was not manufacturing trouble, simply bringing to a head and into the open what was already in the hearts of his opponents.)

His last discourse of all before the cross was to the inner circle of the disciples at the Passover meal he celebrated with them (Luke 22:7ff). There he made clear to them that all the elements of his ministry, as predicted by John the baptiser, were now coming to fullness: the kingdom of God (vv. 16, 18 29-30), the forgiveness of sins (Matt. 26:28), the universal outpouring of the Spirit (John 14-16). This was the time of the promised New Covenant. He prepared his disciples for the ministry that would be theirs after the Spirit’s coming. He reassured them that the events that lay ahead were in the hand of the Father. He reassured them that what he was about to do was strong enough to hold them even as they failed in relationship to him. His disciples should have been prepared for what was about to come, and should have had confidence in God: in fact they were not and did not.

² Bingham, *Salvation History*, p. 72