

Good Friday 2010

a sermon on Luke 23

by David C. Mauldin

Westminster Presbyterian Church, Mobile, Alabama

Jesus died according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God. Peter said that in his sermon on Pentecost. The cross was God's plan. It achieved his purposes. The gospel writers wanted us to see this. That is why they took such care to show how the events of Jesus' life and death fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament.

Woven throughout the gospel passion narratives are allusions to the Old Testament and citations of prophecy fulfilled. Luke does not point these out as much as Matthew or John, who love to say, "This happened to fulfill what was written ..." But Luke was aware of them, and he expected us to be as well. Luke shares the conviction that God guided these events from all eternity. When the risen Jesus met two of his followers on the road to Emmaus, "beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures."

God, you see, had a plan. He had a purpose. What was it? What is it? And why was Jesus' death necessary to achieve it?

God's purpose was that we exist. That we glorify God and enjoy him forever. So he created us to know him and to love him. When we wrecked that, he judged us, but he also stood by us. God is holy and God is good. He will not allow a place for evil within his creation. That is why he judged us. And yet, he loves us as a father loves his children, and so he stood by us. He promised to redeem us, to fix what we had broken, to make things the way he always intended them to be.

God's purpose was to create for himself a special people. He made himself known. And, in the fullness of time, he took flesh and dwelt with us, in order to do for us what we could not do for ourselves.

It was his purpose to suffer and die. Jesus' death was, surprisingly, the end of the old order of sin and death. His resurrection was the beginning of new creation. We await the completion of that. We still look forward to that great day when God will raise the dead in Christ and make all things new. But this is to get ahead of ourselves. Today is Good Friday. Good because Jesus' death achieved God's purposes.

Good because God is holy and good, and he condemned sin. Good because God is merciful and full of compassion. He set us free by condemning our sin on the cross. Christ suffered in our place. He died for us, taking into himself all that separated us

from God. Now, through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, anyone can be forgiven and gain eternal life.

...

Wouldn't you have loved to be there when Jesus was explaining "the things concerning himself in all the scriptures"? Wonderful though that would have been, we at least know what he told them. We know it because he told others, and they passed it on, and it shaped the gospels and the New Testament.

He told them about the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53: "He was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

He told them about the Son of Man in Daniel 7, who suffered but was exalted to God's right hand: "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed."

He told them about the temple and its sacrifices and the forgiveness of sins. He told them about the Exodus and Passover. About a prophet like Moses and a king like David. You know these things if you have been faithful in worship during Lent.

He told them about a new return from exile, about God visiting his people at last to bring salvation. He told them about the new covenant promised in Jeremiah 31: "The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt – a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." This new covenant promised through Jeremiah was sealed in the blood of Jesus.

Jesus told them all this and more. He suffered and died – on purpose – in order to accomplish God's plan. He did it for you, so that you might have life.

The cross is the ultimate demonstration of God's love for us. While we were sinners, Christ died for us. He died so that God's plan would be realized, and so that you and I might have a place in it. We can know God. We can love God. We can be free from sin and death. We can be God's children, part of his special people. The promises are ours,

because he has given them to us. That's why all those details are so important, about Jesus fulfilling the prophecies. We know God keeps his word.

When we look at the cross, we see God's love and God's wisdom. We see the culmination of a plan formed before the ages. Jesus' death was nothing less than the victory of God. That is why this day is good. That is why we remember his death with sorrow and thanksgiving.

Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift. ... Amen.

rev_mauldin@yahoo.com