

EASTER SUNDAY

April 1, 2018

Acts 2:22-24:

***“The Journey That Must Be Made:
According to the Foreknowledge of God”***

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

At the height of his suffering, when everyone around him was challenging his hope and tempting him to doubt God, Job posed this question: "If a man dies, will he live again (Job 14:14)?" Can we with certainty anticipate something more than a short life and then the grave? You can be certain that Job knew the answer to that question. He says: "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me (Job 19:25-27)!" Please keep in mind that Job most likely lived over 2000 years before the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ! And he speaks as if Jesus has already died, risen from the dead, and is about to appear on the earth. That present tense language is stunning, for it reveals that from Job's standpoint it was as good as done even though it hadn't happened yet. That is the nature of every promise of God.

Good Friday is all about Death. Easter is all about Resurrection. Both the Death and Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth are about a journey that had to be made "according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God!" That is another stunning statement isn't it?! It is Peter who tells us in a sermon recorded in the book of Acts that not only did the crucifixion have to happen as it did, but also it was necessary for God to raise Jesus from the dead, setting him free from the pangs of death, because it was not possible for Jesus to be held by it. Please let me say it again, the death and resurrection of Jesus was a journey that had to be made. It was decreed from eternity. It was set in place with the foreknowledge of God. All things were considered. Everything took place just as it was designed and allowed by God.

In Revelation 13:8, the apostle John writes about "the Lamb who was slain before the foundation of the world." Did you catch that?! Jesus is "the Lamb who was slain *before* the foundation of the world!" That my dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ is what we call a "prolepsis." Merriam-Webster defines "prolepsis" as "the representation or assumption of a future act or development as if presently existing or accomplished." Louis A. Brighton gives us more when he comments on the Lamb who was slain before the foundation of the world:

Since God's plan of election in Christ was conceived in eternity, before the foundation of the world, and because God always brings to completion his plans and promises, 13:8 can speak proleptically of Christ having been slain already before the foundation of the world. This statement might be compared to the prophetic perfect of Hebrew verbs, where a future promise of God is expressed as an act already completed. For example, the Isaian Servant Songs often speak of the work of the Servant, Christ Jesus, using perfect verbs as if he had already completed his work (*Revelation*, pg. 346).

Indeed! Just like Brighton comments, the same exact thing is seen in one of the most famous of Old Testament prophecies of all time: Isaiah 53. This section of Scripture amazingly gives us incredible details about the sufferings and death of Jesus on the cross. In some ways, this Old Testament section of Scripture, recorded hundreds of years before the crucifixion, gives us more details about the sufferings and death of Jesus on the cross than what we find in the Gospels. Isaiah writes over 700 years before Jesus is crucified,

and yet he speaks as if this future event is already finished! He writes of the Father saying of his Son, the Suffering Servant:

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors (53:7-9, 12).

So, did God know that if he made the heavens and the earth and gave it as a gift to humanity that humanity would rebel and bring death into his very good creation? Yes! Did God plan the solution to sin and death before the creation? Yes! And why did all of this have to be? While we cannot answer this question in every detail, we can at least make some observations based on what we know from Scripture. Let's begin with what Jesus says in John 15:13, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends." This creation is the place where God shows us, in the greatest way possible, his love! It is one thing to say that you would give up everything (even yourself) for someone. It is quite another thing to actually do it, or have it done for you. This is an eternal lesson of just how "crazy" God really is for us!

The creation of the heavens and the earth, and knowing the fact that humanity would freely fall into sin, afforded God the opportunity *in the greatest way possible* to demonstrate the full extent of his love for us. God sent his Word (his Son), who became one of us, in order that he might die and rise for us. This is no abstraction, but a real event down here where we live. God gives the only thing that can save us from ourselves - the only thing that can be given. God gives everything (he gives himself)! The Son of God will not lay down his humanity to forever bear witness to this. He is and always will be one of us!

Paul writes: "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons (Galatians 4:4-5)." The fullness of time is: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." All time moves toward this truth and from this truth. It is the centerpiece, and the reason why God made things the way he did. The down here was necessary so that we might come to a proper understanding of just how much God really loves us. God wants us to be his eternal companion - his "soul mate" if you will. Like a colorful male peacock, he shows the feathers that we cannot help but to see - and we are mesmerized.

God must do it all. There is God and there is us, and we are not the same. Apart from him there is no us. Our initial rejection of him been the destruction of ourselves and our destination with him. He could have walked away, but he chose not to for the greater good - the demonstration of his love.

It says in Romans 8:28-29: “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.” The *Formula of Concord* says this:

This doctrine also gives us wonderful comfort in crosses and trials, that in his counsel before time began God determined and decreed that he would stand by us in every trouble, grant us patience, give us comfort, create hope, and provide a way out of all things so that we might be saved [cf. 1 Cor. 10:13]. Likewise, Paul treats this matter in such a comforting way in Romans 8:28-39, pointing out that in his intention before time began God preordained what sort of crosses and sufferings he would use to conform each one of his elect to “the image of his Son,” and that the cross of each should and must “work together for the good” of that person, because they are “called according to his purpose.” (FC SD XI:48, 49)

The journey that Jesus had to make is all about us! The cross and empty tomb are about us! His love is beyond our comprehension. He loves us with an exceedingly intense and everlasting love as evidenced by the cross and the empty tomb - all so that we might be with God forever (2 Cor. 6:16b - 7:1). This is also our journey with him “according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God!” In this life, we see the cross and the empty tomb, and we understand - “Oh, how he really loves us! He is ‘madly’ in love with us!” The death and resurrection of Jesus is about a love in which there is nothing greater. I leave you with the words of the Song of Solomon:

Set me as a seal upon your heart,
as a seal upon your arm,
for love is strong as death,
jealousy is fierce as the grave.
Its flashes are flashes of fire,
the very flame of the Lord.
Many waters cannot quench love,
neither can floods drown it.
If a man offered for love
all the wealth of his house,
he would be utterly despised.
(Song of Solomon 8:6-7)

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott