

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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Broadcast Date: 25 March 2018

No.: T1034

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Easter 2018 - The Lord teaches His disciples about His death: His Predictions

Two Christians were shipwrecked and washed up on a desert island. "We're going to die! We're going to die!!" cried the first. The other just sat comfortably under a palm tree and waited. This really infuriated the first man. "Doesn't it bother you being in this predicament?" he ranted. "Not at all, you see I earn a million pounds a week," the second man replied. "Well, how is that going to help us get off this island?" asked the first, mystified. "Well," replied the second, "I tithed to my local church each week so I figure I will just wait for my pastor to arrive!"

Having a calm assurance about the future is a wonderful thing. I guess, though, we need to ask ourselves is that calm justified? This morning we shall start an Easter series looking at the teaching the Lord Jesus gave to His disciples concerning His death. Today we shall look at Jesus' predictions. Next week, we shall look at the last supper, and the lessons we can learn from that. Finally, we shall look at that wonderful Bible study Jesus gave on the road to Emmaus, and see how the Scriptures spoke about His death.

I would like to concentrate our thoughts this morning around three lessons we learn from the Lord Jesus' predictions about His death. We shall see that:

1. God's ways are not our ways;
2. God's plan involves suffering before glory; and
3. God's salvation has been made possible.

1. God's ways are not our ways

"Now Jesus and His disciples went out to the towns of Caesarea Philippi; and on the road He asked His disciples, saying to them, 'Who do men say that I am?' So they answered, 'John the Baptist; but some say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered and said to Him, 'You are the Christ.' Then He strictly warned them that they should tell no one about Him. And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He spoke this word openly. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, 'Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.' When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, 'Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?'" (Mark 8:27-37).

Speculation was rife! Ask any number of people and you would get that number of different answers back. Some said that Jesus was one thing, others another (Mark 8:28). But then Jesus asked His disciples who they thought He was (Mark 8:29). Peter, in a remarkable display of spiritual insight, gives the right answer that had been revealed to him by God (Mark 8:28). It was this declaration that Jesus was the Christ that led the Lord Jesus to speak plainly to the twelve disciples about His impending death (Mark 8:31-33). Jesus knew full well that the cross lay before Him. This was, and had always been, a part of God's plan. However, it certainly was not part of Peter's plan and he rebukes Jesus for His words (Mark 8:32). Jesus responds with gentle firmness to Peter, rebuking him for not having a godly mind (Mark 8:33). Peter viewed things from only a human perspective, and this was faulty. The implications of Jesus' words concerning His death are then made plain. If Jesus was going to pursue a path of sacrifice and death, then to follow Him, His disciples must also be ready to walk such a path.

Three distinct characteristics are clear when we consider how God's ways are not our ways.

- a. God views things from an inward perspective rather than an outward one;
- b. God knows the end of a matter from the beginning; and
- c. God's ways always bring glory for God alone, man's ways never do.

a. God views things from an inward perspective rather than an outward one

This lesson is most clearly illustrated at the anointing of David, king of Israel, in 1 Samuel 16:7: *“But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”* From his understanding of the Old Testament and his hopes for the Messiah, Peter saw only deliverance from Rome, an earthly king in pomp and majesty. He could not conceive of a spiritual kingdom in the hearts of men and women, and so he rebuked the Lord. Jesus’ words about death did not fit with his understanding of the outward appearance of God’s kingdom on earth.

b. God knows the end of a matter from the beginning

We know this to be true because God says it in Isaiah 46:9-10: *“Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure’”*.

God’s omniscience - His ability to know everything - is one of the features that elevates Him infinitely above the human level. If I plan to do something, I often have no idea how it will turn out. If I go to a fancy restaurant and pick something from the menu that I have never tried before, I might be pleasantly surprised and enjoy my choice. Or I might wish I had never chosen that and wished I had known what it tasted like. That is because for us, time is sequential - start, middle and then end. Not so for God. He knows the end of the matter, and all the millions of individual choices that may have gone into that right at the beginning of that matter. So to Peter, and the rest of the disciples, Jesus’ speaking about His death meant that today He warned them, tomorrow they would go to Jerusalem and then He would die and that would be the end. They could not see, but God already knew, that in dying Jesus would rise again in the power of an endless life. Jesus was like that corn of wheat, abiding alone, but if it dies it brings forth much fruit! (See John 12:24).

c. God’s ways always bring glory for God alone, man’s ways never do!

We see this illustrated clearly in the life of Gideon. Gideon was the least inspirational leader God could have chosen, and that by his own admission. Then, to accomplish God’s plan, he was told to shrink the size of his army to minuscule proportions. We read about this in Judges 6:15-16 and Judges 7:2: *“So he said to Him, ‘O my Lord, how can I save Israel? Indeed my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house.’ And the LORD said to him, ‘Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man.’ ... And the LORD said to Gideon, ‘The people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, “My own hand has saved me.””*

God will always work to glorify His name. This is not arrogant. Arrogance is when we think of ourselves better than we really are. This is impossible for God. He is not less than He thinks of Himself; it is just mankind that thinks of Him as less than He is, and in that we are foolish and sinful. So in speaking about His death, all the disciples could see was shame and defeat and an untimely death. Where was the glory in that? But what God saw was entirely different: *“‘Father, glorify Your name.’ Then a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.’”* (John 12:28).

And: *“Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God”* (Hebrews 12:2). When God the Father and the Lord Jesus Himself viewed the cross, they saw something quite different - a pathway to absolute glory.

If we are to take away a practical application from all of this then this morning, we need to learn to look at things the way that God does - not outward appearance, but inner reality. We need to view things in terms of their eternal consequences, rather than just in the immediacy of the present, and we need to always desire glory for God in all that we do.

Now, we must not miss the remarkable point to all this. Jesus was speaking to His disciples about His soon to come death! I know that one day I will die and so can speak about this in general terms, quietly hoping it will be not yet and painless. But Jesus was not doing this. He spoke in specific terms about an actual event that He knew every detail about. Upon His calendar there was a day circled - the year after next, then this time next year, then six months today, then this time next month, then *“this is the day the LORD has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it”* (Psalm 118:24). I have often wondered what it would be like to know exactly when I was going to die, to be able to see the date circled on the calendar. I am not sure that I would be able to handle that kind of knowledge. However, Jesus knew all this for a certainty and could face it with the absolute calm that what He was doing was His Father’s will, although the horror of what it would cost Him appalled Him (see Luke 22:42-44).

What incredible love God must have for us in that He could send the Lord Jesus into this world to save sinners! What an act of unimaginable grace! And yet just as we begin to think that we are starting to understand the greatness of His salvation, God would have us realise that we are still on the starting straight and have not even made it to first base! This majestic plan of salvation was not some hastily put together rescue in response to the fall of man (see Genesis 3:1-7). It was something far, far greater than that. God's plans are truly outside of time!

"All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8).

"I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things kept secret from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 13:35).

"Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world'" (Matthew 25:34).

As we approach Easter, let us open our minds to the true greatness of all that He has done and the awesome work of salvation that He has accomplished. Long before the mighty work of Creation, and the subsequent fall of mankind, God had settled upon the cross work of Calvary and all that that would achieve.

2. God's plan involves suffering before glory

"Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up on a high mountain apart by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them. And Elijah appeared to them with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, 'Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah' - because he did not know what to say, for they were greatly afraid. And a cloud came and overshadowed them; and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, 'This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!' Suddenly, when they had looked around, they saw no one anymore, but only Jesus with themselves" (Mark 9:2-8).

Today we live in a society that is so impatient - it wants everything now, if not sooner! One of the great lessons from the life of the Lord Jesus is that God's plan is always suffering first and then glory afterwards. One of my favourite stories as a child was Stan Berenstain's "The Bike Lesson". In it, a young bear is given his first bike and is eager to ride it. What follows is a series of hilarious accidents as his father teaches him how (not) to ride a bike with the epic words, "First come the lessons, then the fun." It is a lesson we have forgotten in life to a large extent. We want our Christianity to be problem free and uplifting, but we don't want the hardships and suffering that God intends for us first!

So it was, as Jesus and His three disciples ascended the mountain, He was transfigured before them - He became so glorious that His disciples who thought they knew Him so well were terrified. What will it be like when we see the Lord face to face? I think we are all in for a shock! They saw their Master in great glory and were amazed. But what was it that occupied the thoughts and words of the Lord Jesus? Luke's account (Luke 9:28-36) tells us that He was talking about His death that He was about to accomplish in Jerusalem (see Luke 9:31). This was why it was so wrong of Peter to suggest that those booths were built and they stay up on the mountain (Mark 9:5). God's plan of salvation had to be enacted and neither friend nor foe would stand in the way of that happening.

Interestingly, what follows the accounts of the transfiguration is the incident where Jesus heals a father's son (Mark 9:14-29, Matthew 17:14-21, Luke 9:37-42). You can read this for yourself after the broadcast, but in it we have a picture of suffering, as the boy falls down as dead (Mark 9:20), followed by glory, as he is restored whole to his father (see Mark 9:27). Had the disciples been more in tune with their Master they might have picked up on this. Instead, as Jesus again spoke to them about His death, they are left confused and too afraid to ask. I know in my life there have been far too many times when I have been confused about God's plans for my life. Too often this confusion arises because I am not listening and thinking about what He is saying but considering my own desires for my own glory!

As we leave this section let us take to heart the words we read in 1 Peter 1:10-11: *"Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow."*

3. God's salvation has been made possible.

"Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, 'How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!' And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, 'Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.' And they were greatly astonished, saying among themselves, 'Who then can be saved?' But Jesus looked at them and said, 'With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with

God all things are possible.' ... Now they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was going before them; and they were amazed. And as they followed they were afraid. Then He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them the things that would happen to Him: 'Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles; and they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again'" (Mark 10:23-27, 32-34).

It wasn't as if there was no spiritual interest in Jesus' day. The rich young ruler had come to Him seeking to do something so that he might inherit eternal life (Mark 10:17). He had gone away empty, unprepared to meet the cost (Mark 10:22). However, little did he realise that he had been in the presence of the only One who would and could meet the cost of our salvation. So for the third time Jesus spoke to His disciples about the impending events that would lead to His death upon the cross.

Jesus had intimate knowledge of all that was to occur. This was not some general grim premonition but a detailed knowledge of who, what, why and when. Every event, every individual was known to Him. But so too was the outcome - that He would rise again the third day (Mark 10:34) and that this would open up the way for the salvation of the whole world. The rich young ruler thought that there was something that he could do (Mark 10:17). Now we know that there is nothing that we can do to make ourselves acceptable to God, save to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. He has done everything.

This Easter, as we stand at the foot of the cross, and see there the only begotten Son of God, dying, or as we stand looking into an open grave in wonder, let us realise that God has fully met His own righteous demands and so salvation can be freely offered to all.

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Salvation is God's work alone, fully known and appreciated by Him. The wonder of the day that we live in, here in the early 21st Century is that that grace is still available to us. Through His completed work upon the cross you and I can be saved. Now I know I have. Dear listener, can I ask if you have accepted the wonderful salvation of God this Easter time? If not, why not? Do so today.

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