

## HOW DO WE KNOW JESUS ROSE FROM THE DEAD?

Year B      March 31, 2018

Tonight I would like to share one of many theological theories regarding the idea that God had a master plan at creation, and how the manner of death, burial and resurrection of Jesus was an integral part of that plan. This theory says that God, being omniscient and knowing that man would sin and perish without divine help, had prepared a plan for salvation for us to be reconciled with God. This salvation was to be through the death and resurrection of His only Son Jesus Christ.

John opens his Gospel with these words: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him and without him not one thing came into being."

So, it seems appropriate for us to begin our journey tonight from the darkness into light with the story of creation because John tells us that Jesus was there as part of the Godhead.

Now it isn't long after creation before Adam and Eve sin. And, as recounted in the Old Testament, down through the ages, God continues to make covenants with the whole of mankind.

But, God's efforts to try to lead man into a life of righteousness fail time and time again, and man continues to sin.

How then does God find a way to give man, who has been created with a free will... to become reconciled with Him? How then can man learn first-hand how to live a righteous life? God's plan. Jesus, God's Son, was to be incarnate as a man on earth, live among the people, teach mankind by words and by example, and then be put to death, an innocent victim of

the evil that has become a part of our nature. Then out of God's love for us, Jesus was to be raised from the dead to reconcile us with God and bring us hope of eternal life.

But how do we know that all of this happened? While there may not be an agreement of biblical scholars of the exact count, there are many Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament. I would like to share a few of those.

From Zechariah "Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Lo your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

From Psalm 22, "Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing."

From Isaiah in Chapters 7 and 9 it is written,

"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: Look, the young woman is with child and shall bare a son and shall name him Immanuel. He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace."

And from Isaiah Chapter 53, we have the most telling prophecy with verses describing a man "who will grow up before the Lord as a tender plant and as a root of dry ground.

He has no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

He is despised and rejected by men. A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

And, we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised and we did not esteem Him.

He was wounded for our transgressions. And by his stripes (lashes) we are healed.

We have turned, everyone to his own way, and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed and He was afflicted. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before his shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.

He was taken from prison and from judgement and He was cut off from the land of the living. For the transgression of my people, he was stricken. They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb with the rich.

Yet, it was the will of the Lord to crush him with pain. When you make his life an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring and shall prolong his days; through him the will of Lord shall prosper. Out of his anguish he shall see light.

As we hear these words from Isaiah, we as Christians believe that they were all written to describe Jesus as the Messiah.

But, it is important to note that since almost the entire book of Isaiah was found in tact as part of the Dead Sea Scrolls which by scientific consensus of the scrolls themselves have been dated between 200 and 150 BC, there is no doubt that the book of Isaiah was written before the birth of Jesus.

The plan continues when we meet Nicodemus in the Gospel of John when he comes to Jesus in the dark of night to talk to him. Nicodemus is a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin and well respected.

He says “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

It is quite possible that Nicodemus has been sent by a group of religious Jewish leaders who are looking for answers and who are indeed silent supporters of Jesus. Knowing that Jesus is a man of God, Nicodemus has come to see Jesus to learn the secret of eternal life.

This group thinks that how you behave is the key. Jesus says you must be born from above. But Nicodemus, a very learned man recognizes that a person literally cannot reenter his mother's womb to be reborn. So Jesus explains that he is talking about spiritual rebirth and not rebirth of the flesh. Here we get the most quoted line from the bible:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

Jesus has given Nicodemus the answer, not only for him but for us all. Later Nicodemus will defend Jesus before his colleagues in the Sanhedrin, although eventually to no avail. And at Jesus' death, John tells us that Nicodemus accompanies Joseph of Arimathea to anoint Jesus' body.

And that brings us to Joseph of Arimathea. Both the Gospels of Matthew and Mark identify him as a “rich” man and also a respective member of the council. He along with Nicodemus also believes that Jesus is indeed a man who has come from God. He also has an important part.

But, for now, evil will have its way in this story, and eventually Jesus is arrested and brought before Pilate. He is condemned to crucifixions.

I want to point out something very important to this story. Jesus has been severely beaten. An unimaginable beating he knew was coming and in his human heart wanted his Father to stop even though he knew it was already ordained that he must die in just this way. He was to bare the most horrible of pain.

I, and probably you as well, have seen pictures of a fairly unblemished Jesus on the cross. Actually I believe Mel Gibson's movie, The Passion of the Christ, had it right. The pictures I am about to show you

from that movie are very graphic and if you need to, you might want to look away for a moment.

Jesus is nailed to the cross. He cries out to His Father that it is finished. He dies.

The legs of those crucified beside Jesus are broken and Jesus is pierced in the side with a lance.

Now normally after a crucifixion, the convicted and executed prisoner would be left to rot on the cross, and his body would be unable to be collected by relatives for a proper burial.

But, Joseph of Arimathea now goes to Pilate and asks for the body of Jesus, and Pilate grants his request. Jesus' bodily remains, by the nature of his conviction, were to be left on the cross and eventually if anything was left after a period of days, was to have been thrown in a common grave with the wicked. But, just as it was foretold in Isaiah, "he who was to grow up with the Lord, was not to be buried with the wicked but was to be buried in a rich man's tomb."

John says Nicodemus accompanies Joseph of Arimathea to the tomb and brings 75 pounds of spices. According to John, it is now late on Friday and the Sabbath will soon begin, so the anointing and burial must be done rapidly. And, to be sure that the disciples don't come and steal the body, a stone is to be rolled in front of the tomb after the body is prepared and guarded by soldiers.

At this point how can there be any doubt that Jesus truly was dead and was not just passed out even after being pierced in the side with a lance?

It would seem like a body in that condition suffering that much trauma and blood loss which is then anointed with 75 additional pounds of spice, is not likely to be able to get out of the shroud, open a massive rock door and get past soldiers to escape. Nor, we know, were disciples organizing a raid on the tomb and the soldiers guarding it, intent on stealing the broken and decaying body of their friend and teacher. Rather they were huddled up in

an upstairs room shaking in fear. And, they were utterly despondent that they would never see their friend again.

This was because no one believed there was going to be a resurrection, not even Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. However, they played their parts in God's plan. All of these people and events made it possible for the drama to unfold as God had intended. Still to this day, though, there are many who do not believe the story happened this way.

But, my brothers and sisters, we do! All of these human actions seem to be a part of God's plan, so that even 2000 years after it happened, we would know that it was real.

You and I know how this story ends. Then, many, many saw Jesus die on the cross. Then, many, many people testified that they saw him after His resurrection. Now, today, for us His resurrection is true and turns our darkness into Light. And so, ... **tonight we celebrate!**

Amen