

“GOD’S PLAN THROUGH THE AGES”

What is the meaning of life? And what is God’s purpose through it all? The great accomplishments of men usually come after a great deal of planning and preparation. When you see a beautiful building, maybe a skyscraper, you know that that didn’t just dawn on somebody to build a building there one day. They didn’t just go on down to the steel mill and the lumber yard and go to work on it. No, instead the financing had to be found, the property had to be secured. Engineering studies had to be completed and architects had to draw up the plans and the builders had to spend months and sometimes years, building that structure beam by beam and floor by floor, until it was finally complete. The same thing is true with a highway. Somebody didn’t just get a bulldozer and an asphalt machine and haphazardly lay down a road one day. Oh, no. it took years of planning, financial allocation and preparation and then, construction, to bring it to pass.

The same thing is true in a sense, with God’s purpose for mankind, which was unfolded and manifest in Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 3:8-11 “Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord:”

Now, you see, God does nothing by accident, and nothing that is not in agreement with His framework and plan. And that plan does not merely go back thousands of years—it goes back even before the genesis of time. And if you really understand the Bible when you read it, then you understand that everything within it, from Genesis 1:1 has to do with the unfolding of God’s ultimate and eternal purpose. The fall of man in the garden didn’t take God by surprise. Neither did the death of Christ, His Son. Both of those things were within the scope of God’s infinite foreknowledge. God has a purpose, and we’re going to see what that purpose is.

The gospel of Jesus Christ, or the plan of redemption, is sometimes called *the scheme of redemption*. That’s because of the way it was planned, executed and revealed. The apostle Paul’s favorite word to describe the gospel was the word ‘mystery.’ He uses it several times, and that word doesn’t mean strange or beyond our ability to understand. Rather, it means hidden until the time of its revelation.

The gospel plan of salvation was always in the mind of Jehovah God, but it wasn’t until Jesus Christ came, lived among men and fulfilled its requirements and returned to heaven, that it was finally revealed and was no longer kept a mystery to man. The plan itself existed in some form since before the fall of man, and it was developed for us through the ages. We’re going to look at the gospel in five stages: the gospel in purpose, the gospel in promise, the gospel in prophesy, the gospel in preparation and the gospel in proclamation. I think this will help us to see how God developed His plan, and it will help us to

understand how the Old and New Testaments agree, and work together. In fact, if you don't look at the Bible through that lens, then you're going to misunderstand it. Keep in mind that the entire Bible is about one theme: the salvation of mankind through Christ Jesus in His church. That's what it's all about, from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22. Christ is the keynote of this great symphony called the Bible, and His church is the fruition of His work in eternity and here on earth.

I. THE GOSPEL IN PURPOSE

The gospel is something that was purposed.

II Timothy 1:8-10 "Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God; Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel:"

Now, Paul plainly says here, that our salvation was appointed to be in Christ before the world began. Well, what does that mean? It means that this redemption of mankind could only be accomplished by and through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and that God chose and planned this as the means of making us holy and fit to live with Him in eternity. You know, the word "*predestination*" is grossly misunderstood today. Some would have you believe that God selected individuals to be saved before the beginning of time, to the exclusion of others, thereby condemning those people to eternal hell right from the beginning. They had no chance. And only those chosen or preselected by God can understand the gospel and ultimately be saved. In other words, your eternal fate was supposedly decided by God before you even came to be. And if you're saved, it's not because you chose to be, but because God sent some irresistible working of grace into your heart and drew you to the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, He refused to do the same for those whom He did not predestinate in the beginning. My friend, such a doctrine has no foundation in the scriptures, and is, in fact, contrary to the plain teaching of scripture.

Predestination IS a Bible doctrine. Paul talked about it extensively and unquestioningly in his letter to the Ephesian church.

Ephesians 1:3-6 "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved."

Paul goes on from there to show how those chosen in Christ were washed in Christ's blood and reconciled to God. If you go back and read that passage, there is a key phrase that appears again and again here and all throughout Ephesians and in many of Paul's writings, and it helps us to understand what is meant by the term "*predestination*." That is the phrase, "*in Christ*." Look back at Ephesians 1.

Ephesians 1:3 "...who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:"

Ephesians 1:4 "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world..."

Ephesians 1:7 "In whom we have redemption through his blood..."

Ephesians 1:10 "That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ..."

Ephesians 1:11 "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:"

And on and on and on we could go. The phrases "in Christ," "in Him," or "in Whom" all tell us what predestination is all about. You see, God made us all creatures of will or volition, and the Bible bids ALL to come in obedient faith and receive salvation. The Bible teaches that it's God's will that NONE should perish. He doesn't want anybody to perish, but of course, He is confined by His own holiness and righteousness, and we can only come to Him through the redemption that is found in Christ. But God's great desire is for ALL MEN to come to the knowledge of the truth, repent of their sins and be saved. But, you see, God made us creatures of will. We have to make that choice when we are confronted with the gospel.

John 7:37-38 "... Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."

Jesus didn't say 'the select few' who were chosen—He said, "any man" could come to Him and find salvation. Here is where the point is often confused, and here's what Paul was telling us in Ephesians: sinful man cannot find his own way back to God. Man can never become, on his own worth and goodness, good or holy enough to merit God's favor and fellowship. No, it was solely an act of grace that brought about the plan of redemption for fallen man through the remedial work of Jesus Christ, and all who are saved can only be saved IN and BY HIM. Salvation is not the result of man's initiative and effort to get back to God. God determined, or limited in advance, from the beginning, that Christ Jesus would be the means of man's redemption. Salvation was planned only in Jesus, and thus, only for those who would place their trust and faith IN HIM. It was foreordained. The Greek word that the apostle Peter used for that in the following passage means "to know beforehand" or "to foresee."

I Peter 1:18-22 "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you,

Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God. Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit..."

So, you see, it was planned, purposed by God that man would one day be saved IN HIS OWN SON, Christ Jesus, who came and died for us, so that we, through obedient faith could be reconciled through Him to fellowship with God. The gospel existed even from the dawning of time in the form of God's purpose. He predestinated that men would one day be saved and reconciled in Christ Jesus.

II. THE GOSPEL IN PROMISE

God had a purpose from the beginning, and then He made a promise that He would bring that purpose to pass. God chose a man to make that promise to, and through him, He would bring it to pass. That man was Abraham. You recall that Abraham exhibited such faith in God that we came to know him as the father of the faithful. God chose him as the father of a great family and ultimately a great nation, through whom God developed His purpose.

Genesis 12:1-3 "Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."

That promise to Abraham would be repeated again in Genesis 22, 26 and 28. Well, what does it mean? That was a direct promise of the birth of Jesus Christ, a descendant of Abraham, made some 2,000 years before Jesus was even born. Most of the Old Testament record is about the development of the nation that came from Abraham, the nation of Israel, or the Jews. God chose them, and they were the vehicle through whom God developed this plan and brought forth His Son, the Messiah, to save mankind from his sins. He chose them to serve Him, that through that service, He might bring about Christ Jesus the Lord, for all mankind.

But the Bible teaches us that, now, Jew and Gentile are ONE in Christ. In other words, God does not favor one above the other. His purpose for Israel was fulfilled in the coming of the Lord Jesus, and God has now made one new spiritual Israel, or spiritual nation, out of those who are in Christ.

Galatians 3:14 "That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

Later, Paul would say this, concerning Jew AND Gentile:

Galatians 3:26 "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus."

How are we all children of God today? By essence of being the physical children of Abraham? No. you see, in this economy, it has changed. We are not children of God because we are physically related to Abraham. Rather, we are now the children of God *“by faith in Christ Jesus.”* How do we exercise faith in Jesus?

Galatians 3:27-29 “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

So, during the period of the Old Testament, you had the gospel in the form of a promise that was to be fulfilled when Christ would finally be born.

III. THE GOSPEL IN PROPHECY

God not only purposed, and then promised salvation through the lineage of Abraham, ultimately in the personage of Jesus Christ. He then sent His prophets unto them to make sure that they would recognize Jesus when He came. Look at how masterfully Peter ties it all together in the following passage:

Acts 3:24-26 “Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days. Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.”

Friend, all of the prophecies of the Old Testament were given to point men to Christ as the Messiah and the Savior of man. It is important to note that Old Testament prophecy is not about ‘end times.’ Old Testament prophecy is not about future events to us or the end of the world. Old Testament prophecy was the gospel being preached before it came to pass. Do you realize that? The law was full of symbols and types and shadows that pictured the Lord Jesus, who would, one day, come. And the prophets one by one, from Samuel to David to Isaiah to Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, Joel...all the way down to Malachi, were all prophesying about one thing, and that was the coming of Jesus into this world as the Messiah who would save men from their sins. He was pictured hundreds of years before He was born of Mary, to be the prophet, priest and king, who, alone, could redeem mankind from his wickedness. Jesus, from His birth to His death, resurrection, ascension back to heaven, to His coronation and His destroying the Old Testament temple and its symbolic and typical worship...in all of that, He fulfilled every Old Testament prophecy. And we now know that He IS who He claimed to be: the Son of God, full of grace and truth, by the fact that He DID fulfill the hundreds of prophecies about Himself.

So, the gospel was purposed by God in the beginning. It was promised by God in the dawn of time. It was prophesied by God through the developmental dispensation of the Jews and the Old Testament. Then, it entered what we’ll call the stage of preparation.

IV. THE GOSPEL IN PREPARATION

Just as the promises and prophecies of God were about to come to pass, after God had very carefully woven this plan together through the loom of time, He now sets the stage for a great man named John the Baptist. John lived contemporarily with Jesus Christ, but his work preceded the Lord's work here on earth.

Matthew 3:1-2 "In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea. And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

You see, John wasn't part of that kingdom. He was the harbinger who came before, and made things ready for Christ's kingdom. That is one of the glaring fallacies of the doctrine of dispensational pre-millennialism—the doctrine of the rapture and the thousand-year reign that you hear so much about today. All of that insists that Christ's kingdom is yet to come, that it is still yet off in the future somewhere. That doctrine claims that the Jews of Christ's day were not ready for the kingdom and they rejected Jesus, so God delayed His plan until one day when He'll finally bring Jesus back and He'll finally get to reign as King and the Jews will all return and be part of His kingdom. Have you ever stopped to think that if that is what the Bible is literally teaching, then John's ministry was a flop? And so was Christ, when it gets down to it. John said, in the above passage, "*...the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" Jesus sent His twelve disciples and the seventy (**Luke 10:1**) to preach the kingdom of heaven, that the kingdom was near.

Mark 9:1 "...Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power."

They would see the kingdom come with power in their own lifetime! That brief period of a few years before Calvary and Pentecost, was the gospel in the stage of preparation.

V. THE GOSPEL IS PROCLAIMED

Finally, at last, in the fullness of time, the gospel, after being developed by the mind of God, after being promised by God, prophesied by God's prophets, prepared by John the Baptist, the time had come that God proclaimed it to the world. That's when Peter, for the very first time on the day of Pentecost, stood and proclaimed Jesus as Lord and Christ, and men turned to Him in faith and obeyed the gospel in baptism, and received the long-awaited forgiveness of sins. No longer was salvation a potential promise: it was now a manifest reality. Friend, what a thrilling thing! We're not waiting on salvation to come. We can have it NOW in Christ Jesus. That which was predestined, set aside in advance, foreknown and predetermined by God, is now a reality, and ALL can receive it! YOU can receive it today by turning to

Jesus Christ in faith and obeying His word in baptism (**Hebrews 5:9, I Peter 1:22**). Won't you do that today? Be part of God's great plan for your life and for the ages.