

Had to Be Sacrificed

Luke 22:7-13 | Oct. 11, 2020 | Bryce Beale

No hardship has ever happened in this world without a purpose.

Some think, “If a good God is in control, why doesn’t he prevent the hard things that happen?” But to think this way is to underestimate what “good” means. It is to assume that the best possible good is simply the absence of what is hard and what is unpleasant and what is bad.

But do you believe that? Can you think of one rich and compelling story that any person has ever invented, be it a movie or show or play or book, that had nothing bad in it? Are we to conclude that every author is a fool, for allowing bad into their works?

No—the mark of a good author is not that he keeps all bad out of his book or movie, but that he turns that bad to a good end. And when a book or movie is crafted well, when it reaches its highest potential, the bad within it may be deep and dark and painful but it serves a bigger purpose than itself, to make the good ending deep and bright and joyous.

Of course God’s decree of all that comes to pass is different from a human author’s writing of a book or movie. For starters, God has written into existence a real world, not something imaginary.

Yet the comparison holds. God has permitted no evil, not one ounce of it in this wide world, that he will not force to serve a good purpose.

Joseph, having suffered hardship for many years, did not complain of God’s dealings but stated instead, “God meant it for good.”¹ It was bad, but it was meant for good.

You and I may feel that what God allows, or what he decrees, is not good and could not possibly be turned to good. “But who are you, O man,” says Scripture, “to answer back to God?” In other words, are you wiser than God that you would rebuke him? Your wisdom may say, “This cannot be,” while God’s wisdom says, “This must be.” Who is right?

¹ Gen. 50:20 (ESV).

Scripture answers,

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of
God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how
inscrutable his ways!

“For who has known the mind of the Lord,
or who has been his counselor?”

“Or who has given a gift to him
that he might be repaid?”

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To
him be glory forever. Amen.²

So we say with Joab, David’s general, “may the LORD do what
seems good to him.”³

If it seems good to him, then it is good—no matter what it may
seem to us. The evil present all around us is no argument against
God’s complete control of all things; it is in fact the reason we
must not waver in our confidence that God does control all things.
This is our hope in a turbulent world; God’s sovereignty is a solid
place to plant our foot, when every other plot of ground is
slipping away into the sea.

“Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.”⁴ He
“works all things according to the counsel of his will.”⁵ He is in
control.

The control of God in the midst of our world’s many evils is not
only the story of our lives; it is the story of our text today in Luke.
We have just begun the end of Luke and are moving quickly
toward the death of Jesus outside of Jerusalem, on a Roman
cross. He is now one day from that death, and he prepares to
have one final meal with his disciples.

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² Rom. 11:33-36.

³ 2 Sam. 10:12.

⁴ Ps. 115:3.

⁵ Eph. 1:11.

The very start of this passage reminds us of what lies ahead, one day in Jesus' future. "Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed."

Every Passover lamb ever sacrificed in the long history of Israel was a shadow, and now we come to that great object which cast those shadows. Every little lamb slain for the sins of God's people pushed our gaze forward to this, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

He is our Passover Lamb. Paul says exactly this in 1 Corinthians 5:7: "Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed." But that is Paul speaking after the Friday of this week; here in our text, we stand before that Friday. As of yet "the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed"—not merely the one who would be used to prepare Jesus' final meal, but Jesus' himself.

And what we find in that phrase, "the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed," summarizes our whole text for today. There is a great tragedy—a sacrifice, a death—but in God's good purposes it *has to be*. There is Christ's control over the circumstance, despite the tragedy and pain and evil of the circumstance—he will be slaughtered the next day! Yet his tragic death will not prove that Christ is overcome against his will; no, he moves calmly and steadily toward that death of his own choice, to bring about good that many, by his sacrifice, might be made alive.

Let us see then the control that Christ displays even at this dark hour in our text—and let us see it first in the Passover itself, and then in the preparations Jesus makes for that Passover.

The Passover

So then, before we proceed into the larger part of our text, we should meditate a moment longer on just this first verse. What do we learn of Jesus' control of his circumstance from this verse?

"Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed."

By way of reminder, the Feast of Unleavened Bread was one of the three major annual feasts of the Jewish calendar. It was a week-long festival with a convocation or sabbath at its start and end. But unique to this festival was the fact that it was immediately preceded by a single-day celebration known as the Passover.

The entire festival commemorated God's deliverance of the Israelites out of their Egyptians slavery many, many years before. And this single-day Passover celebration which began the festival was celebrated with the sacrifice of unblemished lambs in the temple, the meat of which was roasted and then eaten at a meal. This is the meal that Jesus is about to eat with his disciples.

Now what is very clear to us from all our gospel accounts is this: Jesus' death is connected to the Passover. He is the Passover Lamb, unblemished, not left upon the cross until morning—he is the fulfillment of the Passover. His sacrificial work is tied to the great Passover celebration.

But what is especially interesting is the fact that God wants us to associate the Passover both with Jesus' final meal and with his sacrificial death on the following day.

In Mathew, Mark, and Luke, it is clear that Jesus himself celebrates the Passover while he is still alive. The Last Supper, which is the basis of our own celebration of communion as Christians, was a Passover supper. Here in Luke we have come to the day of the Last Supper, and it is called "the day of Unleavened Bread"—another name here for the Passover, which began the Feast of Unleavened Bread. If we were in any doubt the next comment makes this clear: "on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed."

Why would God tie this final meal of our Savior to the Passover? What is the reason for their connection, and why is Luke recording that connection now?

At least part of the answer is this: to remind us that Jesus kept the Law of Moses.

Jesus was a Jew—a faithful and observant Jew. His behavior on earth was not haphazard; he was careful to keep the Old Testament laws, even here at the day before his death. And why was he careful to keep the Law? Galatians 4 tells us: "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."⁶ This is why Jesus chose to be baptized by John, even though he had no sin to

⁶ Vv. 4-5.

repent of. “Let it be so now,” he told John, “for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.”⁷

As Jesus draws near the tragedy of his death, he persists in his good purpose—to observe God’s law for us, so that in dying he might take our curse for disobedience and give us his blessing for obedience.

Paul again in Galatians puts it this way:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”— so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.⁸

When any person exercises faith in Christ today, that person’s cursedness is entirely removed, no matter what he or she has ever done in violation of God’s law. And instead of curse, blessing is credited to that person’s account—the very blessing Christ earned by his perfect adherence to the will of God.

So it is important that Jesus, on the eve of his death, should once more prove himself a faithful and observant Jew. He observes the Passover for us.

But an amazing fact of Scripture is that, by some unexpected discrepancy in calendars, Jesus also died on the Passover. The Gospel of John makes this clear—Jesus will be crucified at the time that the Passover lambs are sacrificed in the temple, and before the Passover meal is observed by the Jews.

How can it be possible that the Passover and Passover meal should take place here on Thursday, but then occur again at Jesus’ crucifixion on the following day, on Friday? How are there two Passovers and two meals?

The most likely explanation is that different ways of reckoning days were being used by different people in Jerusalem. It seems that those who came from the north, Galileans like Jesus and his Twelve, counted the Passover as lasting from sunrise Thursday morning to sunrise Friday. So northerners would celebrate the Passover within that span, on Thursday evening. Southerners on

⁷ Matt. 3:15.

⁸ Gal. 3:13-14.

the other hand, natives of Judea, reckoned from sundown to sundown: sundown Thursday to sundown Friday. So they ate the Passover Friday evening. This would have split the Passover celebration into two days, with some having their meal Thursday evening and some Friday evening.

And Jesus, being from the north, can eat a Passover meal with his northern friends, while still on the following day suffering sacrifice on the cross at the time of the Passover.

So, to make all of this information brief, God wishes us to see not only the Last Supper as tied to the Passover, but also the very sacrifice of Jesus as tied to the Passover.

And this of course is for obvious reason. Jesus' death is the fulfillment of all that the Passover stood for. The Passover lamb had to be unblemished—Jesus was without sin. The Passover lamb could not be left over until morning—Jesus was taken off the cross before morning. And the Passover lamb turned away the wrath of God, just as Jesus' blood turns God's wrath away from all of us who have sought shelter beneath it.

Again, as Jesus draws near his death the scene may seem random and chaotic and unfortunate—but as Jesus knows, it is none of these things. This is the moment of sacrifice that had to be. The Passover lamb had to be sacrificed—Jesus had to be sacrificed. He maintains his control, even as he moves toward betrayal and flogging and misery and death. These do not disprove his control! He faces them all on purpose, to ransom his people, to deliver them from the angel of death, from the wrath of God.

We see therefore in the Passover itself repeated proof that Jesus is in control of all that is transpiring, regardless the tragedy and evil of it all.

Preparation

With this meditation on the first verse complete, we can move now to the verses that remain. This Last Supper and the crucifixion that will follow are not accidents overtaking our Savior—they are part of his good purposes. And now we find further proof of Christ's full control in how he prepares his final meal.

So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat it." They said to him,

“Where will you have us prepare it?” He said to them, “Behold, when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him into the house that he enters and tell the master of the house, ‘The Teacher says to you, Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ And he will show you a large upper room furnished; prepare it there.” And they went and found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover.⁹

Luke alone of the Synoptics—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—tells us that Jesus initiates this discussion. He tells two of his closest disciples, Peter and John, to go and prepare the Passover meal. Preparing the Passover had many parts to it: they would need to purchase a lamb, take that lamb to the temple for sacrifice, roast its meat, get bitter herbs, acquire wine, and find several other items for the meal.

But the first task required is to find a room for the meal.

Jerusalem would be filled to brimming with pilgrims and it is possible that finding a room this close to the meal would have been difficult for the disciples on their own.

But Jesus is fully in control of this situation.

Now, some believe that Jesus had gone and prepared ahead of time, so that nothing miraculous is in view in this passage. That is possible, but why then record this happening in such detail? It appears instead that Luke wishes us to feel the supernatural strength of Jesus’ knowledge. When Jesus was entering Jerusalem at the beginning of the week, he sent two of his disciples to find a colt for him to ride—and there, as here, many details are given that Jesus predicts ahead of time.¹⁰

In both cases, it is most likely that Jesus knows these details by a supernatural foreknowledge. In both cases, we marvel at his calm control during these last days. He is not surprised by anything that occurs—he knows the future.

In fact, it could well be that Jesus sends these two disciples without an exact address in order to prevent Judas from betraying

⁹ Luke 22:8-13.

¹⁰ See Luke 19:28-34.

him too early, before he partakes of the meal. Judas will not know the place of the meal ahead of time, so he cannot convey that information to the religious leadership. Jesus knows what Judas is planning, knows that he must be betrayed, and he is setting the timeline for that event. In the same way, he also knows just what these two disciples will encounter when they enter Jerusalem.

And what is that? When Peter and John enter Jerusalem, they will see a man with an earthen jar of water. They will follow that man into a house, and then they will speak to the master of the house, who will lead them upstairs to a large room already prepared for guests, perhaps with sheets spread over the couches.

But here is the key detail, in verse 13: “And they went and found it *just as he had told them.*”¹¹

From here to Luke’s end, there will be tragedies. The greatest evil of all time will be committed. An innocent man will suffer horribly. One of the Twelve will betray this man; the other eleven will forsake him; the legal system will fail him. The world will push him up onto a cross to be rid of him, and heaven too will reject him from above. He will be made a curse, and the object of mock and ridicule. And then he will die.

If ever there was a time to ask, “Where is God?” it will be then! If ever it might seem that Jesus was overtaken by his enemies and subject to the whims of human jealousy, it will be then. Where is justice? Where is God’s good purpose? Where is the good God, Creator of heaven and earth and their judge? If God is good, why is his Son suffering like this?

Those who pass by that cross will wag their heads and offer these very doubts: “If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.” The appearance is that Jesus has failed, that he is not truly the Son of God, or that if he is his Father has nevertheless forsaken him forever. Evil has won. Where is God? If he is good and in control, how could this ever have happened? So, some will deny his control.

Yet if there is one thing that our present passage—really, that all of Luke leading up to the crucifixion and following it—is poised to demonstrate, it is that Jesus is not a helpless victim of evil. He is in control of everything happening here. “I lay down my life,” he

¹¹ Emphasis mine.

says in John's Gospel, "that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord."¹²

Can't you feel the calm assurance of Christ on this day, the eve of his torturous death. He knows what is coming—who could ever read Luke's account and conclude otherwise?

A lot of bad is about to fall on Jesus' head—not because God cannot keep it from falling upon him, but because that bad must serve God's good purposes. Jesus could have summoned his legions of angels and escaped the bad. He was in control. And he chose, willingly and freely, to face the bad, so that out of the bad might come great good.

That good is your salvation. Without the bad of the cross on Friday, you would remain forever under God's curse. You needed that bad to happen. Jesus knew this and so, though he was quite clearly the master of his own fate, he endured the cross, despising the shame.

And now, Christian, what will you do with the many evils and tragedies that surround you? The temptation will always be to doubt Christ. If he were in control, wouldn't things look different? Wouldn't all these hardships have been prevented? Would he not have kept his name from dishonor, his flock from confusion, his children from pain?

And when those questions inevitably arise, answer them with this: "they went and found it just as he had told them."

If you must face some cross on Friday, do not think that the bad of Friday is the story's end. For on Sunday, the good will appear. Christ walks boldly to the bad of Friday, because on Sunday he will defeat that bad, will even turn it to his good ends and purposes.

And what he has done through his own trial, he will do through yours. He is in control, and in time he will make this clear.

¹² John 10:17-18.