

Man with a Mission

December 8th, 2013

Luke 18:31-34

"³¹And taking the twelve, he said to them, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. ³²For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. ³³And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise." ³⁴But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said."

In a 2007 interview for Parade Magazine, actor Brad Pitt described his upbringing in a Southern Baptist church and expressed a respect and appreciation for the value of religion in a person's life. But he went on to describe how the faith he was raised in didn't really "work" for him, and it wasn't something he held on to. He explained why:

"I didn't understand this idea of a God who says, 'You have to acknowledge me. You have to say that I'm the best, and then I'll give you eternal happiness. If you won't, then you don't get it!' It seemed to be about ego. I can't see God operating from ego, so it made no sense to me."

His observation – that God in Christ is zealously committed to and pursuing the whole-hearted, worshipful devotion of all people -- was entirely accurate. We've seen it repeatedly in Luke's gospel: "²⁶If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple" (cf. 4:18ff). What kind of an egomaniac says something like that?

Now I thought of all this because of my contemplating again the title which Jesus used to speak of Himself, "Son of Man": "³¹We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished..." As if it's not strange enough to see a man refer to himself in the third person, this designation (which was Jesus' favorite way of speaking of Himself, approx. 25 times in Luke) is rooted in Daniel's prophecy about a great, divine King who would be presented before God the Father, the Ancient of Days:

"¹³“I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. ¹⁴And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.”

So every time Jesus refers to Himself this way, He's making a statement, "I'm the One who has dominion over all people, places and things, the One before whom everyone should serve, the King and Lord of all whose Kingdom will never be destroyed!" Now do you see how someone (like Brad Pitt) might get the impression that Jesus is just a raving egomaniac; why should we worship or admire someone so self-consumed?

Not Egomania, but Love

There is, of course, a solution to this conundrum: if the admiration and enjoyment of greatness is one of the sweetest, most satisfying experiences, and if our hearts are hard-wired share that satisfaction with others (the way we do with, say, an amazing sports play), and if God (revealed most fully in Jesus, the radiance of the Father's glory and the exact imprint of His nature) is the most admirable and greatest reality in the universe, then our hearts' deepest joy would be found in the admiration of His greatness. And if our sin had separated us from this greatness, but God in His mercy sent Jesus to atone for our rebellion and make a way back to the eternal enjoyment of His beauty, and if that atonement and reconciliation cost Jesus His life, would we call that egomania, or love?

That was the mission of Jesus in His first advent (from the Latin, *adventus*, coming), and that mission of love is what Jesus is describing here in Luke 18. This text shows us that in His first advent, Jesus Christ was a man with a mission. So we'll linger on that for a good bit today, and then look very briefly at a second thing we see here, which

is a group of men without a clue. A man with a mission, and a group of men without a clue.

The Old Testament is all about Jesus

"³¹And taking the twelve, he said to them, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished." Since 9:51, Jesus has been steadily moving towards Jerusalem, He's very determined and intentional about what He's doing, where He's going, and what's going to happen there: "³²For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. ³³And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise." This is the third time that He's explicitly mentioned this, and several others where it's implicit. The cross is not an accident or surprise; it's the plan, the mission.

And it's a mission that had been laid out long before Jesus was ever born in Bethlehem. It's (His betrayal, suffering, death and resurrection) what the prophets wrote of. After His resurrection, Jesus broadened this out even wider, saying that the whole Bible was speaking of and preparing for His advent:

*"²⁷And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them **in all the Scriptures** the things concerning himself."*

Jesus is saying to these disciples that their whole Bible – what we call the Old Testament – is all about Him. Everything was pointing to and is now being fulfilled in Him. That's why Jesus says in 18:31 that everything written about Him will be accomplished. Though I always learned, "Jews don't celebrate Christmas," Christmas is the celebration of the fulfillment of everything that the Jewish Scriptures had promised and anticipated. If Jesus isn't for the Jews, He's not for anyone!

How the Bible is Like Star Wars

What this means is that there is not a dichotomy between the Old and New Testaments, as if the Old Testament describes an angry God while

the New Testament shows a gracious God. They go together, sort of like the episodes of the Star Wars series. As I'm sure you know, they released episodes 4-6 a few decades ago, and then just recently they released episodes 1-3. Everyone will tell you that it is essential that you watch the later episodes before the earlier ones. The first three are good, exciting, they have a theme and plot that you could follow without knowing what happens in the other ones. But knowing how the story ends in episodes 4-6 brings a much deeper enjoyment in viewing the earlier ones, and things come into view in 1-3 that you can't grasp if you've not seen 4-6, and know where the plot is ultimately headed.

The Bible is a bit like that (or more precisely, Star Wars is a bit like the Bible). In the Old Testament (episodes 1-3!) there are some great, dramatic stories which will rivet your attention, like Joseph and the Exodus and the rise of King David and Esther and Jonah. You can read these stories and enjoy them immensely on their own. But when you know that Jesus Christ is before all things (Revelation 13:8, 2 Timothy 1:9), the revelation of that in the New Testament enables you to see the Old Testament with greater clarity, and with greater enjoyment. These stories, which were interesting in their own right, take on a greater significance when seen in view of the life and death of Jesus.

Jesus, the Greater...

So Adam's experience and temptation in the Garden (Genesis 3) prepares the way and anticipates Jesus, the second Adam (Romans 5:12ff, 1Corinthians 15:43), who passed His test in the Garden of Gethsemane, and whose righteousness is imputed to us to overcome the sin that was imputed to us when the first Adam fell into sin and plunged the whole human race into sin with him.

Jesus and His covenant love towards His Bride, the Church, is in view when God performs the first marriage in Genesis 2 between Adam and Eve. ³¹"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold

fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”³²This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church" (Ephesians 5:31-32).

Jesus, though being dealt a painful blow on the cross, crushes the head of the serpent (Satan) just as God said He would after Adam and Eve's fall: "15I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." (Genesis 3:15, 1John 3:8)

The death of innocent Abel at the hands of Cain (Genesis 4) points us to Jesus, the greater Abel, who, though innocently slain, has blood that cries out not for our condemnation, but for acquittal (Hebrews 12:24).

God's call to Abraham and his departure from his father's home (Genesis 12) points us to Jesus, the greater Abraham (John 8:53ff) who left heaven and journeyed into the wilderness to form a new people for God.

When Isaac carried his own wood and got on the altar to be sacrificed by his father (Genesis 22), he was a foreshadowing of how Jesus would lay down His life to be sacrificed at the hands of His Father.

Jesus is the greater Joseph (Genesis 37-50), who serves at the right hand of God the King, and extends forgiveness and provision to those who have betrayed Him, and uses His power to save.

Jesus is the greater Moses, who stands in the gap between a sinful people and a holy God (Exodus 32:30), One who by His indestructible life always lives to make intercession for us.

Jesus is the greater Passover Lamb (Exodus 12), whose blood was spilled and then smeared on the doorposts of our hearts so that God's judgment on sin might pass over us.

Jesus is the goal of the Law (Romans 10:4), the One who the Law was meant to lead us to, that our mouth might be stopped by our failure to

obey so that we would run to Him and be justified by faith (Galatians 3:19ff).

Jesus is the greater and final blood sacrifice, whose blood is of infinitely greater worth than the blood of bulls and goats, and is offered once for all time to sanctify and cleans us completely (Hebrews 10:1ff).

Jesus is the greater temple, whose flesh was torn like the curtain into the Most Holy Place (Hebrews 10:19ff), so that we could draw near to God with a clean heart and bold assurance of acceptance.

Jesus is the greater bronze serpent (Numbers 21:4ff), who was lifted up on the cross so that rebellious sinners could look to Him and have God's wrath removed from us (John 3:14-15).

Jesus is the greater Boaz (who redeemed Moabite Ruth during the time of the Judges, and together they became great-grandparents of great King David, Ruth 2-4), who redeemed the hated Gentiles and folded them into the family of God (Ephesians 2:11ff).

Jesus is the greater David (1 Samuel 17), the courageous Shepherd who has slain the Goliaths of sin, Satan, death and hell, and whose victory becomes ours though we never lift a stone to accomplish it ourselves.

Jesus is the greater Preacher (who laments the futility of life under the sun in Ecclesiastes), who absorbs in His own body the curse of creation's futility (Galatians 3:13, Romans 8:19ff), triumphs over the grave and raises us up over the sun to be seated with Him in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:4-6).

Jesus is the greater Job, the truly innocent sufferer, who then intercedes for and saves His stupid friends who were of no help or encouragement (Job 42).

Jesus is the greater Esther, who didn't just risk leaving an earthly palace, but lost the ultimate heavenly one, who didn't just risk his life, but gave His life to save His people (Esther 4).

Jesus is the greater Jonah (Jonah 1-3), who spent three days in the grave, not in the belly of the great fish, to save a multitude far greater than Nineveh, from every tribe, tongue, and nation (Revelation 5:9).

Jesus is the greater Hosea, who enters into covenant love with a wayward, whoring bride and continues to lovingly pursue her while she goes after her paramours (Hosea 1-3).

Jesus is God's Anointed One (Messiah, Psalm 2), the Son of Man (Daniel 7:13-14), the Son of David (Isaiah 9:6-7, Luke 1:32-33), the Shepherd of the Sheep (Ezekiel 37:24ff), the Lord our Righteousness (Jeremiah 23:6), the priest after the order of Melchizedek (Genesis 14:17, Hebrews 7), the true Manna from heaven (John 6:30ff), Living Water in the wilderness of our sin (John 7:37), Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14), the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:7), the Great 'I AM,' (Exodus 3:14, John 8:58), the first and the last (Isaiah 44:6, Revelation 21:6), the beginning and the end, the suffering Servant (Isaiah 53), the true prophet, priest and King. It's all about Him!

And Jesus is the mediator of a New Covenant (Hebrews 9:15), which God promised the people of Israel through His prophets, looking to a day when God would pardon the sins of His people and write His law on their hearts, giving them His own Spirit so that they might walk in His statutes. It's this covenant that Jesus died to fulfill on our behalf: "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."

The Reason for Jesus' Suffering and Death

That is *why* the events that were coming would take place: "³²For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. ³³And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise.'" He suffered as an atoning sacrifice for sinners, as Isaiah so vividly depicts in the 53rd chapter (we know this passage is crucial to Jesus' self-understanding, because on the night of His betrayal He quoted it to His disciples, Luke 22:37):

"³He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. ⁴Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed.

⁶All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. ⁷He 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...¹⁰Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief...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."

Could the Word of the prophets have been any more clear about what Jesus would accomplish, and why? And did not Jesus faithfully fulfill all that God promised would happen, through His suffering and death? And because He was faithful, and made a sufficient sacrifice for the sins of His people, God raised Him from the dead:

"¹⁰Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. ¹¹Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities." (cf. Psalm 16:10-11, Acts 2:24ff)

We Worship a Faithful God

There is much, much more to share, but for now, let's draw out a simple implication of all this. The Advent season, and the Christmas celebration, is the celebration that in Christ, God is a faithful, promise-keeping God. If you, like the disciples (v.34), are having a hard time grasping what God is doing in your life, if it doesn't make sense, may the truth of Christmas drive you deeper into faith and confidence that God will not fail to keep even one of His promises to you (Philippians

4:19, Romans 8:32, 1 John 3:2, Romans 8:18, etc), all of which find their “yes” in Jesus (2 Corinthians 1:20).

³¹“See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished.” And at the cross, and three days later by an empty tomb, it all was in fact accomplished. So take courage, brothers and sisters, He will not fail to keep all the promises yet to be fulfilled, when He breaks through the heavens and makes His second, and final, Advent.

Marvel that You’re Saved

And one last thing, now that I have mentioned this clueless group of men who heard Jesus utter these words: ³⁴“But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.” What was behind this hiddenness? The folly of their own unbelief (cf. 24:25). And what turned things around for them? After He died on the cross and rose triumphant from the grave, He said to these same disciples:

⁴⁴Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” ⁴⁵Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,”

If, this Advent, you have not gone the way of Brad Pitt and concluded that Jesus is an egomaniac, but if you see glory shining in the face of Jesus Christ, and you believe what the Word of God says about Him, that He is the hope of the world, the Savior of the broken, the King of kings and Lord of lords, marvel today that you believe! Because if you do, it’s not because of your superior intellect, or humility or moral strength and virtue. It’s because He, as He did for those clueless disciples 2,000 years ago, has opened your minds and enabled you to see. Praise Him today, for revealing to you such a great salvation, and such a great Savior.