

THE MYSTERY OF GOD

Part 8

Romans 5:8-11

For a number of weeks now I have been bringing to your minds—and I hope to your hearts—that from before the beginning of time, God has been pursuing a plan. It was a plan for the reconciliation of sinful men to Himself. Well, what does that mean, “the reconciliation of sinful men to God?” Well, what does it mean if a husband and wife are reconciled? The word *reconciliation* is a word having to do with relationships. Here in Romans 5, it is referring to the restoration of a person’s relationship with God. It speaks about a relationship that was broken, but is now restored. It speak about a relationship that had gone wrong, but is now made right again. Reconciliation involves forgiveness and renewal. It means, as Paul said, that God no longer looks upon us as ungodly, as sinners, as enemies. It means that we are one with God again. The mystery of God is that plan for our reconciliation to Him, that He has been pursuing from before the beginning of creation.

That plan—**Ephesians 3:11** calls it God’s “*eternal purpose*”—is spoken of in the New Testament as the gospel. The execution of that plan was begun at the dawn of history, but it reached its most critical stage with the coming of God Himself to earth, and in His dying on the cross as a perfect sacrifice for the atonement of the sins of the world.

What I want to do this morning, and oh how I hope you will join me in this, is to take a closer look at that sacrifice. This is still a part of what I have been referring to as studies in “the mystery of God.”

If you will just give it some thought, you would agree that the most critical element and time in the unfolding of God’s plan was when God Himself came into this world. From the moment that was first announced to Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, and to Mary, to the time when the Son of Man was lifted up on a cloud and ascended into heaven, literally, the only hope—THE ONLY HOPE—for mankind, for any of us, hung in the balance! And at no time was that balance more precarious than during those last few, final days and hours that Christ was upon the earth.

We really need to think about why all of this is true.

Satan, of course, was and is no dummy. What had been almost invisible to mankind, even to the leaders among the Jews, Satan must have seen fairly early. He saw and heard all of the clues that God had been giving over several thousands of years. We can be sure he knew all of the hundreds of prophecies given concerning the coming of a Savior, a Redeemer, a King. Maybe he didn’t have any better idea of just how God was going to bring everything about any more than any other angel, but he had to know something was going to happen. I am confident of this much, the coming of Christ did not catch Satan completely off guard.

In fact, he was immediately ready to act just as soon as Christ was born! Think about it people! Have you ever wondered why Christ was born in almost total obscurity? Why was he born in Bethlehem instead of Jerusalem just six or seven miles to the north? Why was he raised in Nazareth, for heaven's sake! Why was the announcement made to some shepherds and not in the halls of the Roman Senate, or to a convocation of the Sanhedrin? Think about it brethren! Satan may not have understood that Christ was God, but he knew that his birth was going to somehow be a key element of God's work, and Satan was totally committed to destroying all of God's work. So in that little village that day, in blind fury, Satan gave the world a taste of what was to come in the senseless slaughter of the innocent children of Bethlehem. He unleashed his unbridled hatred that would continue like a flood against Jesus until that fateful day on Golgotha.

Of course, all of his efforts were doomed to failure! They had to fail; this was God that He was opposing. This was God's plan that was in motion. God said, *"heaven and earth will pass away, but my Word will never pass away."* And what was that word from God? Go back and read it for yourself—there are dozens of places where you can find the scriptures telling in plain English what was going to happen. Read Genesis 3:15, or Psalm 2, or Isaiah 53 again; it was no secret what God was going to do. It really wasn't even a secret HOW He was going to do it! Jesus Christ came for one purpose. The Hebrew writer tells us that he came to taste of death for every man (Hebrews 2:9).

In Luke 9 we read about what we call the transfiguration. We read that Christ went upon a mountain with three of his disciples—Peter, James and John. While there, His appearance began to change. His clothing became dazzling white. Verse 31 says, *"And behold two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem."*

Do you think that the death of Christ was some kind of accident; that somehow God underestimated the power of Satan and evil people? Is that what you think? No, No, No! A thousand times no!

Listen—will you really listen, and try to understand—what Peter said the first time the gospel was preached after Jesus' death, and resurrection. Turn to **Acts 2, beginning in verse 22**, Peter says, *"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men."*

In **chapter 4**, we find almost the same thing said again, but in a prayer by the apostles. **Beginning in verse 24**, they prayed:

"Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, 25) who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, "Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? 26) The kings of the

earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed'-- 27) for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, 28) to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

I want you to understand—this is so important—that it was God, not Satan that drove the events that took place on Golgotha that fateful day. Satan was there, and for sure he had a part in it, but it was God who had planned for that day, and put history into motion to bring about that day, the greatest day in the history of the world! Brother Burton Coffman says, *“The Lord permitted him [Satan] to ply the scourge, swear the lies, hurl the insults, drive the nails, press the crown of thorns, shout imprecations, and thrust the spear; but it was surely God who ‘laid upon him the iniquity of us all.’”*

I think it is doubtful that Satan knew at the birth of Christ that this was God Himself. Had he known that fact, for sure he would have known the futility of trying to kill God. **Revelation 12:7-9** makes it clear that the contest between God and Satan was decided long before the creation. Satan may have figured out that in some way a child would have some special place in the scheme of things; God had been using children all along—Isaac, Moses, Samuel, John the Baptist. He may have known that this child would somehow serve as a Savior, that he would somehow be God’s anointed servant, but my guess is that it didn’t immediately dawn on him that this would be God Himself!

I know that he finally realized that! At some point the truth began to dawn on him, and that’s when a radical change in strategy took place. Maybe you have wondered why there is so little information given about the infant years and the childhood years of Christ. I believe it is because God was essentially keeping Jesus “under wraps” until He was totally ready to begin the divine mission that He has been sent to carry out. When did Satan finally realize that Jesus was God? We can’t know for sure, but surely he knew by the time Jesus came up from the waters of the Jordan following His baptism. Remember, it was at that time that the Holy Spirit came down in the form of God, and the voice of God spoke from heaven, *“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”*

Whether it was at that moment, or sometime earlier, can you imagine the absolute shock and horror that Satan must have experienced when he knew that he was now dealing, not just with some human being created by God, but rather with the Creator—his creator—himself! I can well imagine that at some point, Hell had its 9/11 moment. Those forces identified in Ephesians 6, the rulers, authorities, cosmic powers over darkness, and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places were thrown into panic mode!

When you think about it, there were really just two options left to them. There could be just two ways to thwart God’s eternal purpose. One way would be to somehow entice God Himself to sin. If that didn’t work, and I am sure that Satan didn’t have a whole lot of hope for that to

happen, then the only other option would be—are you listening?—the only other option would be to somehow keep Christ from dying on that cross.

You remember, don't you, you remember that's what he did. Matthew 4, Luke 4, both give us a brief account of that first, vain attempt. The Bible says Jesus was "*tempted by Satan.*" The New Testament writer James tells us (1:13) that God cannot be tempted with evil, but remember, Jesus was God who had taken upon himself the likeness of human nature. In that nature, just like every one of us, Jesus *COULD BE* tempted. The Hebrew writer tells us, "*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.*"

Don't ask me to explain it, I just know what the Bible says. Mark says (1:13), "*And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan.*" Now, what if Christ had given into Satan's temptations? I want you to think about that. Think about the unthinkable for just a few moments. What if Jesus, like us, had had a momentary lapse of understanding and didn't realize what was happening? What if He had fallen for one of Satan's cunning attacks? Suppose that in becoming a man, in taking upon himself the form of a man, that he was so handicapped that even he could not be totally perfect?

Keep in mind, if He is to be our example, or model in any sense of the word, He had to be able to face these temptations as a man, not as God. God couldn't be tempted, but obviously, God limited by his human nature could be. What if Christ had yielded to even one of those temptations, would that have been God as God sinning? No, it would have been God as man sinning. It might have shown a fatal flaw in man's design, that he was somehow incapable of doing anything else except sin. But Christ didn't yield, but it wasn't God as God overcoming sin, it was God as man overcoming sin. There was no fatal flaw in man's design.

If Christ as a man had given into temptation, Satan would have won, of course, and the whole plan of redemption would have been blown out of the water! You and I would be here today without any hope or remedy at all for our sins. I want you to understand that it wasn't God being tested that day in the wilderness, it was man! And who was it that passed the test? It was man! That's why we have to keep reminding ourselves that our message forever has to be "Christ and Him crucified!"

Christ didn't give into temptation but do remember the words of **Luke 4:13**, at the end of temptation scene recorded for us by Luke? Luke tells us, "*And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.*" Can you imagine that! The unmitigated gall of that king of demons! He lost the round and he lost badly, but he didn't give up, and trust me, he is going to stay after you and me as long as we are alive. That's why we need Christ. He not showed us that Satan can be resisted, he can be beaten. But Jesus also made it possible for us to be forgiven of our sins when we don't win.

I hope we are thankful for that and that we don't just somehow, blithely take it all for granted, that He was God and it was no big deal. It was a huge deal, and we owe him everything, don't we? I love the words to that song—it's my favorite song because of these words: "*Were the*

whole realm of nature mine, that were a present far too small; love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all."

So if Satan couldn't get Jesus to sin, somehow he had to keep Jesus from dying on the cross. This was the ultimate work of God that Satan came to destroy. Somehow, he would have to get Jesus to decide that mankind really wasn't worth saving. He would have to be made to think that mankind just wasn't worth the cost, that dying for the sins of the world was like casting pearls before the swine.

Have you ever thought that maybe Jesus wrestled with that, that this was a greater temptation to him than anything he faced in the desert?

We know that there must have been some thought given to these things. Think about his prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, prayed not once, but three times! "*Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me.*" Do you think it didn't cross his mind that even at that moment, he could still call for twelve legions of angels to come and rescue Him? Have you ever had to do something that you just really didn't want to do? Do you remember struggling to find a way to get out of doing it? I don't claim to understand all of what was going on His mind, but I can read, and I know this much: Jesus wasn't looking forward to what he was about to do! He wasn't relishing the task of becoming sin, and taking upon Himself the sins of the world? This wasn't a walk in the park, and I dare say that none of us have ever, ever, had to face such a tormented moment.

Think about it people! What if Satan could have found a way to keep Jesus from dying on the cross? He tried, didn't he?

- Witnesses were brought against Christ, but they couldn't prove anything.
- Pilate didn't find anything for which Jesus should be put to death.
- Remember the offer Pilate made the people? Because it was a holiday, or holyday for the Jews, Pilate was willing to release to them one prisoner. He thought that if he gave them a choice between Jesus and a murderer by the name of Barabbas, that the people would surely choose Jesus over him. But no, that didn't work.
- Then Pilate's wife came urging her husband not to have anything to do with Jesus because she had suffered much because of a dream about him.
- He even had Jesus almost beaten to death so that he wouldn't have to be nailed to the cross, but even that didn't work.

I am so thankful that Christ did not abandon the mission, even at the last, terrible moment. Can you imagine, hanging there in all of that pain; that incredible suffering and shame? Imagine as his life's blood runs out of His injured veins, the very people He was dying for are hurling insults and cursing at Him. For them to say, in mocking tones, "*Come down from the cross now, and we will believe you!*" Imagine how difficult it had to be for Jesus to allow himself to go to that cross and stay there until death came! **Luke 9:51** says, "*When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.*" He wasn't going to give up! Thank God He didn't give up! Oh, what He endured for you and me! Even though Satan

wanted to keep Jesus from dying on the cross; nonetheless he did everything he could to heap suffering and shame upon Him. Brother Burton Coffman penned a piece on the sufferings of Christ from “A” to “Z,” suggesting that the devil held nothing back in his sadistic cruelty and evil cunning. Listen to this:

[The Sufferings of Jesus, From “A” to “Z”]

I’m telling you the truth, I don’t understand why a number of you will not be back this evening. I don’t want to even leave this place. I wish I didn’t have to go anywhere or deal with anything other than dwelling upon what God has done for me through Christ. I don’t want to do anything other than obey the gospel of my God, and spend the rest of my days on earth living for His glory.

THE SUFFERINGS OF JESUS From “A” to “Z”

“A” is for Jesus’ *arrest*, roughly treated like a common criminal.

“B” is for Barabbas, a murderer exchanged for the Prince of Peace.

“C” is for the *crown of thorns* pressed upon his head, and for the *cross*, a form of execution, the cruelty of which is unsurpassed.

“D” is for the *desertion* of his disciples.

“E” is for the *enemies* who encircled him like ravenous wolves.

“F” is for his *fainting and falling* under the weight of the cross.

“G” is for the *gall* given him to drink when he cried, “I thirst!”

“H” is for *Herod, and the hall* where our Lord was mocked.

“I” is for the *insults* hurled at him again and again.

“J” is for *Judas*, disciple and friend who betrayed the Lord for thirty pieces of silver.

“K” is for the *kiss* by which Judas betrayed him.

“L” is for the *lies* spoken against him.

“M” is for the *men, the malefactors* crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left.

“N” is for the *nails* driven in his hands and feet.

“O” is for the *order* given by the governor that Jesus be executed.

“P” is for *Pontius Pilate, the priests and the Pharisees*.

“Q” is for the *quaking* of the earth when this vile deed was done.

“R” is for the *robe* placed upon him as the King of Kings was cruelly mocked.

“S” is for the *spitting* in his face, and for the *shame* of being stripped to hang naked before the world.

“T” is for the *tears* that were shed because “they know not what they do!”

“U” is for the *unjust and ungodly trials*, six in all, in which the innocent was found guilty.

“V” is for the *vulgar and vile* things said about him that day.

“W” is for the *water* by which Pilate vainly attempted to wash his hands of Christ’s blood.

“Y” is for *your sins* and mine which is the real reason why Jesus died that day.

“Z” is for the *zeal* with which the mob clamored, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!”

“What about the “X” you ask. Well “X” you see stands for the unknown, and what is unknown is just what Jesus’ suffering and death will do for you. Will you recognize it for what it was and be saved by it, or will you pause for a just a little while and then move on?

The Alpha and the Omega awaits your decision!