

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

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Sharing the Good News

by Dan Trygg

“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...” 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

I had the opportunity to overhear someone sharing the gospel with someone the other day. Although he did an adequate job, I felt like he missed some key parts, over-emphasized some aspects, and underplayed or ignored other things that I would have been sure to mention. It got me thinking, “What *are* the key elements of God’s plan of salvation?” If someone were to ask, “Tell me, what does the Bible really teach regarding how and why we need salvation through Jesus,” ...what would I say?

1.) We were created with a purpose. The Bible teaches that human beings were unlike any other aspect of creation. While elements of our Creator’s great power can be understood in the reaches of the universe, and the vast expanse of the heavens, the seas, the mountains, the storms and powers of nature around us, ...and His amazing intelligence, orderliness, balance, intricate and meticulous skill can be discovered in the creation around us on every side..., there is nothing else that compares with humankind to display and express the elements of personality and moral character that the Bible says are the fingerprints of God’s handiwork. **We were uniquely created in God’s image and likeness.** He carefully formed us and breathed into us His animating Spirit to give us life and personality. **We have a capacity to interrelate to each other, and to God, at a level no other creature is able to approach.** God sought to deepen and develop this capacity, by giving us areas of stewardship and creativity, responsibilities of oversight, service and expanding horizons to explore. We were created as the pinnacle of His created work, and we were to bring Him glory like no other creature. We were entrusted with a capacity for self-awareness and self-determination **Our purpose was to glorify God,** by emanating His good character and creative abilities over all our interactions with Him, each other and our delegated areas of responsibility (Gen. 1:26-31; 2:5-24; Psa. 8:4-8; Isa. 43:7).

2.) We chose to disregard God, and introduced the destructiveness of sin and death into all aspects of this earthly creation. Human sin destroyed the harmony, health and balance of nature, beginning with our own inner selves and our relationship with God. God had warned Adam that if he ate of the tree of the experiential-knowledge of good and evil that “dying you will die” (Gen. 2:17). From the earliest chapters of the Bible, it is apparent that humankind was born on a spiritual battlefield of cosmic proportion. This is evident as Satan, in the form of a serpent, introduced suspicion and distrust into the minds of our first parents, and they chose to disobey God. By this choice, they also aligned themselves with Satan the rebel. **Immediately, they felt “naked” and self-conscious (3:7). They hid themselves from each other,** under crudely-devised coverings, and **they also tried to hide from God** when they heard His presence coming near. **When confronted about their sin, they attempted to pass the blame,** instead of honestly acknowledging their fault. **The resulting effects of their choice were legion: Their work, which had been easy and delightful, became arduous and laborious.** They struggled to provide. **Competition and a selfish desire to control entered human relationships.** Childbirth came with great pain, yet God told them their hope for freedom and victory from the serpent’s lie would come through a future male child. **They were driven away from the paradise God had made for them** into a world that was being unraveled by the sin and death they had introduced (Gen. 3:16-24; Rom. 5:12; 8:19-22). The corruption of sin not only affected them, but **all their natural offspring were born in their fallen image. The human race became sinners by nature, as well as by choice.** Although God graciously cared for them, the intimacy they had once known was now gone. Sin had broken the trust relationship they had with Him. They felt as though He had withdrawn from them. Their sin had made a breach in their relationship with God (Isa. 59:2). Furthermore, **the estrangement Adam and Eve felt after their sin would plague each generation.** They would all be “estranged from the womb” (Psa. 58:3). **This inner sense of emptiness drives people to search for fulfillment and meaning outside of themselves.** People try many different things (Hab. 2:4-20; Eph. 4:17-19; Acts 17:26,27), but really only God Himself satisfies the longing of the heart.

3.) God demanded that payment be made for sin. Because of His holy and righteous nature, God could not just sweep sin under the rug. **His holiness is His complete moral purity and separateness from anything unclean and imperfect.** The prophet wrote, “Your eyes are too pure to behold evil, and You cannot look upon wickedness” (Hab. 1:13), and David wrote, “...no evil may dwell with You” (Psa. 5:4). God is light; there is no darkness in Him, at all (1 Jn. 1:5). **The response of His holy nature to sin and imperfection is wrath.** He immediately wants to destroy and remove the defect. Just as we have a “gag reflex” toward a bad smell, **God has a “wrath reflex” toward sin.** In addition, **His righteous and just nature demanded the execution of the penalty for disobedience. Death was the penalty for the transgression against God’s command.** It was immediately experienced as a spiritual severing of intimacy with God, and a resulting inner emptiness. Then, it became evident in the aging process and eventual physical death of the body. **Ultimately, it would result in eternal separation from God in a place of punishment reserved for Satan, his angels, and**

those aligned with him (Matt. 25:41-46). **God's just character demanded that humanity pay for its sin.** Sin came by a man, so a man must pay to make it right. Furthermore, *every person must somehow be put to death for their own sins.* The defective nature must be destroyed and made new once again. In fact, **the sins, defects and imbalance of the entire world must not only be paid for, they must be undone** and the world must be remade. Anything less than complete restoration and healing is not sufficient to satisfy His justice. **Anything less than complete purity would be expelled from God's presence, or destroyed by His wrath.** It is obvious that no one could accomplish all of that. In fact, because we are all sinners, we cannot even die for the sins of even one other person. We could only die and pay for our own sins in hell forever. **There is nothing we could ever do to remove the penalty, pain, stain or repercussions of sin. We are totally helpless to save ourselves.**

4.) From the outset, God initiated a plan to save us from the power and penalty of sin, to liberate us from bondage to Satan, and to fulfill the requirements of His wrath and His justice. Because He had a strategy to save us, He righteously stayed the execution of His wrath against us until the solution could be provided (Rom. 3:23-26). Although it would take thousands of years of preparation before the answer would be clearly prepared for and presented, God immediately started to instruct humankind in a fundamental concept that would be the *basis* of His ultimate plan. **God covered their nakedness with the skins of animals** (Gen. 3:21). **Other innocent animals had to die in order to temporarily cover the shameful nakedness that resulted from their sin. This developed into the concept of substitutionary atonement (covering), the basis for the animal sacrifices offered throughout the OT.** The idea was that the life of the animal was given in temporary exchange for their own life, which they knew was forfeit because of their transgressions. **Why did God delay for centuries?** He was going to do something that was sooo big, sooo incredible, it would not only cover the sins of individual people, it would cover, fully pay for, and remove the sins of the entire world! (Cf. I Jn. 2:2.) **God wanted to make sure that He prepared a nation to understand the significance of this act, so that they would recognize it, appreciate its significance and spread the story to every nation on the planet.**

5.) God chose to work in the life of a man from Ur (a city in ancient SE Iraq). **God called Abram to leave his homeland and go to a new land which He would show him** (Gen. 12). **Abram (later called "Abraham") believed and obeyed God, and became the founding patriarch of the Jewish nation.** He and his descendants were *not* special, or more righteous than anyone else (Deut. 7:6-8; 9:4-6). God simply chose to work through them to prepare for His answer to the sin problem. **God brought them into Egypt as a nomadic family-clan, and delivered them from slavery there by a powerful display of miracles several centuries later. This was culminated by the Passover,** a substitutionary sacrifice that spared them from God's judgment on the Egyptians. They were now a nation of several million people. **God made a covenant with them through His prophet, Moses, to be their King. They were to be His people, dedicated to Him.** If they would obey Him, He would bless them, and would make them a light to other nations, a kingdom of priests. If they disregarded Him, it would lead to their downfall and expulsion from the land. If they later repented, He would bring them back to this land He had promised to Abraham. **As part of this covenant, God revealed more about His holiness, the need for substitutionary atonement, and that sin must be dealt with.** To leave it uncovered or unaddressed brought about an uncleanness in the eyes of God and an accumulating debt of consequences, wrath and judgment.

6.) Through the succeeding centuries, God laid down a wealth of prophetic clues regarding His final answer to the sin problem. He would raise up a descendant of David, who would initiate an everlasting Kingdom that will spread across the entire world (2 Sam. 7:12,13; Isa. 9:6,7). He will be a suffering Servant, who will take upon Himself the sins of all people (Isa. 53). He would be One whose goings forth were from eternity, but would be born in Bethlehem of Judah (Mic. 5:2). He would be the promised seed of the woman, born of a virgin, who would crush the head of the age-old serpent.

7.) This Promised Deliverer actually showed up, as prophesied, in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. He powerfully demonstrated Himself to be the Promised One, fulfilling the prophecies, proclaiming the Kingdom, calling men and women to follow Him, dying in our place as a substitutionary sacrifice of *infinite* worth, and then rising again from the dead in glorious victory! He showed Himself to hundreds of eyewitnesses (I Cor. 15:5-8), whom He commissioned to broadcast the message and recruit active followers to His Kingdom (Matt. 28:18-20). **He not only died for us, but He took us into Himself so that we could be put to death in and with Him, be buried with Him, and raised with Him as new creatures in Him.** His death and resurrection stripped the devil of his power and authority (Col. 2:12-15). **He has come to destroy the enemy's works and set people free from bondage to him** (I Jn. 3:5-8). **He will judge and overcome the devastation and corruption of sin.** Even the entire creation will be remade (Rom. 8:18-21), and He will ultimately reign over His redeemed people on a new earth, where there is no more death, no more mourning, crying or pain (Rev. 21,22).

8.) We can experience His salvation by faith (Eph. 2:8,9). We confess that we are sinners, lost and unable to save ourselves. **We acknowledge Jesus as the Promised Deliverer, the substitutionary sacrifice God Himself put forward on our behalf.** As we take God's gift of grace offered to us in Christ, we agree to abandon our self-agenda in order to become a child of God in Christ. **We give our lives to God, and take Jesus as our Savior and Master** (Jn. 1:12). We choose to live to serve God and His will, sealing this commitment by being baptized in water as a demonstration of dying to our old life, and rising to a new life in Him. **God promises to give His Spirit to those who trust in Jesus** (Acts 2:38,39). **We expect to be schooled, empowered and led by Him, and apply ourselves to learn how He operates in our lives.**