

LITTLE HILL CHURCH

'THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD IN SALVATION' [PART 1]

On my more recent visits to Little Hill Church I have been sharing thoughts on the Sovereignty of God. We looked at God's sovereignty over all; in creation and nature; over nations and their governments; over disasters and the devil's part in them. My recent article looked at God's sovereignty in plagues. So now I thought we ought to look more into the good news! Therefore, I want to share some thoughts about God's sovereignty in 'Salvation'. Firstly it is:-

DIVINELY PLANNED SALVATION

As I write this, we are still in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic and none of us know who is going to succumb to the virus next, or where it might flare up again. That is not the only danger we keep hearing about. Pretty well every day there are news reports and articles giving dire warnings about the effects of global warming; and there are still some awful conflicts going on in different parts of the world.

Even so, the greatest threat to the world is hardly ever mentioned! That being the constant and deepening rebellion of the human race against God and his law and God's deserved judgement because of it. This rebellion began in the garden of Eden when - *"sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned"* (Rom 5v12). The wonderful good news however, is that God had already planned salvation for humanity.

The pivotal point of that plan of salvation was to be in the giving and death of God's own dear Son. The salvation of the world was to be accomplished through the - *"precious blood of Christ, like a lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world"* (1 Pet 1v19-20). That is why, immediately after Adam and Eve sinned, God foretold his plan to - *"put enmity between you and the woman [representing the human race] and between your offspring [meaning the whole realm of the kingdom of darkness] and her offspring [the incarnate Lord Jesus]; and he shall bruise your head, and you will bruise his heel"* (Gen 3v15). God made that prediction because he had already planned it. We must always remember that God's plan of salvation was never a 'knee jerk' reaction to the fall.

VIVIDLY PICTURED SALVATION

A very clear evidence of the planned nature of salvation is seen in the way it is graphically illustrated all through the Old Testament. God warned Noah of his coming judgement and gave him the plans for the ark. We are told - *"By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world"* (Heb 11v7). During the time of construction, Noah was a - *"herald of righteousness"* (2 Pet 2v5) but the ark itself was also a testimony to the need of shelter from God for the day of judgement to come.

Then we have the example of Abraham being called to - *"Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love...and offer him as a burnt offering"* (Gen 22). It would be very difficult to imagine a more striking illustration of God's plan of salvation to be achieved through the offering of his Son.

Then we have the most enduring illustration of salvation in the Passover (Exod 12). Painting the blood of a slain lamb on the door frame of the Israelites dwellings was a graphic illustration of the need of covering in blood of the 'Lamb Of God' in order to come safely through the judgement of God. Jewish people still celebrate Passover after all these years, along with the other feasts given in the Old Testament.

There is the outstanding picture of salvation in the construction of the Tabernacle and followed by that of the Temple. The whole sacrificial system, including the institution of the Priesthood and High Priest, together with the basin for cleansing, the golden candlestick, altar of incense, the Holy of Holies with the mercy seat, the ritual of the Day of Atonement etc. was all deliberately designed by God to - *"serve as a copy and shadow of the heavenly things...Moses was instructed by God, saying, See that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain"* (Heb 8v5). God placed such a powerful constant representation of his plan of redemption at the centre of the life of the nation of Israel.

Then there are the pictures of the bronze snake lifted up on a pole; Manna from heaven and water from the rock; Jonah released from his watery grave on the third day. God is such a wonderful God to give to the world, for the last three and half thousand years, such amazingly vivid pictures of his great plan of salvation and they are all there for us to read about in Scripture

The fact that all this is in the Old Testament shows how wrong it is to think that it is only about God's wrath and then the New Testament is about his love! The whole Bible is full of God's great salvation plan, so let's keep on reading both testaments, asking him to - *"Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law"* (Psl 119v18). It is in the Old Testament pictures that we can - *"Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"* (John 1v29); and as we see him there, let us worship and adore him.

PLAINLY PROPHESED SALVATION

Perhaps even stronger evidence of the fact that salvation was planned by the sovereign God is found in the abundance of Old Testament prophecies regarding it. This was certainly a matter of very real confidence for the Apostle Peter. He had no doubt that - *"Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and enquired carefully, enquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the*

sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories” (1 Pet 1v10-11). The Apostle Paul was also inspired to point out that - *“Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures”* (1 Cor 15v3-4); the Scriptures being the Old Testament.

Both Peter and Paul are telling us, that when it comes to God’s great and planned salvation, it is all there in the Old Testament! The New Testament then takes up that plan and records how it was implemented in the Lord Jesus Christ and explains it further with its implications for the world, including us. Here are but a few such prophecies:-

Micah prophesied the place of Jesus birth about 700 years before he came (5v2); Zechariah foretold the Triumphal Entry about 500BC (9v9); Psl 22 prophesied in such detail over 900 years before the event, how Jesus would look and in what circumstances he would die; the whole of Isa 53 does similarly 700 years beforehand. There are many more prophecies concerning the great plan of salvation which demonstrates that it was all God’s wonderful plan from the beginning.

In the light of the fact that salvation is God’s great eternal plan, it could be asked - ‘Why did he take all those centuries giving pictures and prophecies about it?’ Could he not have - *“sent his Son into the world that the world might be saved through him”* (John 3v17) straight away following the Fall, or after the Flood or the Exodus? A variety of suggestions have been made, but the actual answer is hidden away in the mind of the Father. What we can say with certainty is that - *“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”* (Gal 4v4-5). That *“fullness of time”* was - *“the date set by his father”* - as illustrated in v.2.

I think it is also fair to say that over the many years given by God to picturing and prophesying his salvation he has been providing the human race with the human race with:-

Time For Education:

Adam and Eve needed time to learn the awful consequences of their rebellion - the damage to their relationships with God and each other; the hardship of working the cursed ground; the pains of having and rearing children; the awful results of jealousy leading to murder, and so on. As the human race expanded it needed to learn the dire consequences of wickedness, as in the Flood; the futility of pride in its own achievements and plans outside God’s will, as in the tower of Babel; and so on! It is interesting to notice that the writer to the Hebrews points out that in Old Testament times the sacrifices were - *“a reminder of sins every year”* (10v3). The tragedy is that, by and large, humanity still hasn’t learned the vital fundamental lesson that God is a God who keeps his promises of retribution as well as of blessing. Sadly, the human race is extremely slow to learn the lessons of its rebellion against its Creator and what he has planned for its salvation!

Time For Recognition:

All the Old Testament pictures and prophecies were given to prepare the world to receive and recognise God’s Saviour. One of the world’s greatest tragedies is that the Saviour came into the world that was - *“made through him, yet the world did not know him”*! That was certainly true of the vast majority of the Jewish nation - *“He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him”* (John 1v10-11). So much so that when Jesus was in Nazareth and quoted Isaiah’s prophecy about himself - *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour...all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff”* (Luke 4v18-19/Isa 61v1-2). So the world, generally speaking, continues to refuse to recognise Jesus Christ as its Creator, Saviour and Lord.

Time For Conversion:

On the day of Pentecost, in preaching the gospel to the crowds, Peter reminded them of many Old Testament prophecies pointing to God’s plan of salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ, and then, how they had rejected him and had him crucified. The result was that a large number were - *“cut to the heart, and said, Brothers, what shall we do?”* Peter’s answer was - *“Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins”* (Acts 2v37-38). Later on the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write about how God, all down through the centuries, had been showing his - *“kindness and forbearance and patience”* - which included his giving a multitude of pictures and prophecies of his salvation, because his - *“kindness is meant to lead you to repentance”* (Rom 2v4-5).

There can be no question that from before creation God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, planned his great salvation. It was - *“In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will”* (Eph 1v4-5). Paul wrote to Timothy that God - *“saved us...because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began”* (2 Tim 1v9). It is a marvellous truth that God was so determined and passionate about saving sinful people, before he ever began to bring the universe into being. Furthermore, he is just as passionate about saving sinners today, and that includes people like you and me!

Well might we sing in wholehearted praise:-

‘Oh the love that drew salvation’s plan,
O the grace that brought it down to man,
O the mighty gulf that God did span at Calvary.’