

Luke 18:31-34
The Suffering Messiah

Jesus, of course, is the Son of God. He is the Messiah, God Incarnate, sent to redeem the sons of men from their sin. He is the Prince of Peace, Lord of Lords, and King of Kings. While on earth He drove out demons, healed the sick, and raised the dead. He calmed storms and fed thousands. He confounded the religious leaders of His day and confronted evil. He forgave sins and forgave those who sinned against Him. He ministered to individual needs and disciplined His closest followers. He established His Church.

Nonetheless, Jesus knew from the beginning He was going to die. And not just the fact that because He became human He would die a natural death, but rather that He was to be sacrificed for the sins of mankind. He knew the cross was His destination. All His life pointed toward that. His entire life was lived “on His way to Jerusalem” (Luke 13:22). He knew where He was going and what He would do when He got there.

Yet, throughout history, man has tried to explain the crucifixion of Jesus not as the premeditated act of a sovereign God, but rather as an unhappy accident. Some suggest that the death of Jesus was the tragic result of a well-intentioned young man who had noble ideas, but failed to realize that he pushed the boundaries of religious toleration too far. Others argue that his misguided nationalism led to a foolish attempt to set up a kingdom in the midst of the Roman empire and was doomed from its very inception. Still others, less impressed with Jesus’ admirable qualities, simply see Him as a religious fanatic or delusional. Someone who, with irony, we might say today had a “Messiah complex.” In each of these explanations there is one common factor, and that is that the death of Jesus was unplanned and unforeseen.

Nothing could be further from the truth as expressed in Scripture. The Old Testament is filled with references to, and prophecies of, the death of the Messiah. There are too many to list here, but perhaps the most poignant is,

“²For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot,
And like a root out of parched ground;
He has no stately form or majesty
That we should look upon Him,
Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.

³He was despised and forsaken of men,
A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;
And like one from whom men hide their face
He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

⁴Surely our griefs He Himself bore,
And our sorrows He carried;
Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten of God, and afflicted.

⁵But He was pierced through for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;

The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him,
And by His scourging we are healed.
⁶All of us like sheep have gone astray,
Each of us has turned to his own way;
But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all
To fall on Him.
⁷He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet He did not open His mouth;
Like a lamb that is led to slaughter,
And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers,
So He did not open His mouth.
⁸By oppression and judgment He was taken away;
And as for His generation, who considered
That He was cut off out of the land of the living
For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due?
⁹His grave was assigned with wicked men,
Yet He was with a rich man in His death,
Because He had done no violence,
Nor was there any deceit in His mouth” (Isaiah 53:2-9).

Jesus, Himself, spoke often of His destiny.

“For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (John 6:38).

“Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour” (John 12:27).

And He had tried to explain this to His disciples from the very beginning of His ministry.

“³⁴And Jesus said to them, ‘you cannot make the attendants of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them, can you? ³⁵But the days will come; and when the bridegroom is taken away from them, then they will fast in those days’” (Luke 5:34-35).

“²¹But He warned them and instructed them not to tell this to anyone, ²²saying, ‘the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised up on the third day. . . . ⁴⁴Let these words sink into your ears; for the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men’” (Luke 9:21-22, 44).

“But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished!” (Luke 12:50).

“³¹Just at that time some Pharisees approached, saying to Him, ‘go away, leave here, for Herod wants to kill You.’ ³²And He said to them, ‘go and tell that fox, “behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I reach My goal’” . . . ³⁴O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not have it! ³⁵Behold, your house is left to you desolate; and I say to you, you will not see Me until the time comes when you say, ‘blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’” (Luke 13:31-32, 34-35).

“²⁴For just like the lightning, when it flashes out of one part of the sky, shines to the other part of the sky, so will the Son of Man be in His day. ²⁵But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.” (Luke 17:24-25).

In this passage, Jesus again tried to explain to His disciples what must befall Him. His time was drawing to a close. There was urgency in His voice. He needed to make certain His followers were prepared for what was to come.

The Prediction

As they neared Jerusalem, Jesus “took the twelve aside” (v. 31). Jesus and the disciples had probably already crossed the Jordan River and were on the outskirts of Jericho, from where they would begin the trek up into Jerusalem (Luke 18:35). Creating some privacy for Himself and His disciples, Jesus perhaps spoke softly so He would not be overheard by others in the nearby crowd. He probably spoke quickly. That neither Luke, Matthew, nor Mark have lengthy reports of this conversation in their narratives, indicates that not much was said. Jesus went straight to the point. The disciples probably thought they were going to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover - as indeed they were. But there was so much more to it than that, and Jesus tried once again to explain. This was the beginning of the end.

Jesus was a dying Messiah. That concept was quite beyond the disciples - or any Jew for that matter. Jews expected a Messiah that would drive out the Romans, establish the kingdom of Israel, and restore Jerusalem to its former glory. Jews scattered around the known world would then return to celebrate and rejoice in the new center of the world. This was what the Jews expected. This was what the disciples expected. Jesus knew better, and He knew that the welcome He would receive from the religious leaders in Jerusalem would confound His muddled disciples.

Jesus tried to be reassuring. He explained that “all things which are written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished” (v. 31). Jesus knew that His death would be a shock, so He wanted His disciples to remember that it was not a surprise. He wanted His disciples to keep in mind that what was about to happen had been predicted. This was a part of God’s eternal plan. This was what the Jewish people had been waiting for. The term “Son of Man” was a title given to the Messiah (Daniel 7:13-14), and Jesus used it with the knowledge that later on it would help His disciples remember that Jesus’ death was a part of God’s plan.

This plan was eternal. The signs had always been there - for those willing and able to see them. After the Fall, Adam and Eve “sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings” (Genesis 3:7). They knew they had sinned, but fig leaves were not enough to cover their sin. Therefore, “the Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them” (Genesis 3:21). The skin of animals required sacrifice; it required death (the first recorded in Scripture). It was the first lesson that sin could only be atoned for by blood.

Another sign was recorded later in Genesis. Obeying the command to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice, Abraham slowly made his way toward Mount Moriah. At the last moment God interrupted him. God had another plan. “¹³Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in the

thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son. ¹⁴Abraham called the name of that place The Lord Will Provide, as it is said to this day, ‘in the mount of the Lord it will be provided’” (Genesis 22:13-14). The story was told for centuries how God provided the appropriate sacrifice. The Passover lamb was yet another illustration of God’s eternal plan to redeem His people. ²³“For the Lord will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to smite you. ²⁴And you shall observe this event as an ordinance for you and your children forever” (Exodus 12:23-24).

Not only was God’s redemptive plan foreshadowed through historical events, but it was also foretold through specific prophecies. Consider the details of Psalm 22,

¹⁴I am poured out like water,
And all my bones are out of joint;
My heart is like wax;
It is melted within me.
¹⁵My strength is dried up like a potsherd,
And my tongue cleaves to my jaws;
And You lay me in the dust of death.
¹⁶For dogs have surrounded me;
A band of evildoers has encompassed me;
They pierced my hands and my feet.
¹⁷I can count all my bones.
They look, they stare at me;
¹⁸They divide my garments among them,

And for my clothing they cast lots” (Psalm 22:14-18). This is but one of the Old Testament prophecies the disciples knew about, though they clearly did not fully understand their significance.

The Pain

In speaking of Himself, Jesus continued, ³²“He will be handed over to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and mistreated and spit upon, ³³and after they have scourged Him, they will kill Him” (v. 32-33). The brief account of the words of Jesus as recorded by Luke, are elaborated on in the accounts of Matthew and Mark. Taken together, they provide a fuller description of the extent of suffering Jesus knew He was to endure.

¹⁸“Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, ¹⁹and will hand Him over to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and on the third day He will be raised up” (Matthew 20:18-19).

³³“Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and will hand Him over to the Gentiles. ³⁴They will mock Him and spit on Him, and scourge Him and kill Him, and three days later He will rise again” (Mark 10:33-34).

Matthew and Mark include two facts that Luke does not, namely that Jesus would be betrayed by the chief priests and scribes, and that Jesus would be condemned to death. All three evangelists include the facts

that Jesus would be given to the Gentiles for final judgment, mocked and spit upon, scourged, and killed. Thankfully, each also include the comforting fact that Jesus would rise from the dead.

Though the Jews would orchestrate His arrest, Jesus would be handed over to the Gentiles because Roman law prohibited the Jewish religious leaders from exacting the death penalty. Only Roman authorities had such power. And this power would be used to destroy Jesus. Jesus understood what was to come. He recognized the extent of what He was to suffer. And His suffering was not limited to physical pain, though that would be unimaginable.

First, Jesus would suffer being betrayed. He would face the fact that one of His closest followers would turn on him. After all He had invested in him, Judas Iscariot would renounce Jesus and betray him to the Jewish authorities for thirty pieces of silver. These coins were, quite probably, the denarius. A denarius was the equivalent of a day's wage for a worker. So thirty pieces was about five weeks of work, since Jews did not work on the Sabbath. This is a little more than a month's wages, significant to be sure, but not exactly "life-changing" money. And for that Judas betrayed the Son of God.

Second, Jesus would suffer being rejected. Jesus was rejected by the religious leaders of His own people, the very ones whom He had been sent into the world to save. He would be rejected by the people, who "kept on calling out, saying, "crucify, crucify Him!" when given the choice by Pontius Pilate (Luke 23:21). He would be even rejected by His remaining disciples who, when confronted with the reality of the arrest of Jesus "left Him and fled" (Matthew 26:56). They fled for their lives when confronted with the reality of the arrest of Jesus. Finally, Jesus would be even rejected by God the Father when on the cross.

Third, Jesus would be humiliated. Though "in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form" (Colossians 2:9), Jesus would be "mocked and mistreated and spit upon" (v. 32). As Luke would describe in detail.

³⁵The people stood by, looking on. And even the rulers were sneering at Him, saying, 'He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One.' ³⁶The soldiers also mocked Him, coming up to Him, offering Him sour wine, ³⁷and saying, 'if You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!' ³⁸Now there was also an inscription above Him, 'THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.' ³⁹One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, 'are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!'" (Luke 23:35-39).

Think of it, Jesus would be mocked by the people milling about, just enjoying the entertainment value of this public display of Roman cruelty. The religious leaders would join in as well, encouraging the crowd in its mockery. The soldiers assigned this gruesome task would relish their opportunity to not only inflict the physical pain they were so gifted in dispensing, but also the emotional pain of utter public disgrace. Even one of the convicted criminals, himself suffering the same punishment, would try to squeeze one last pleasure out of life by mocking Jesus.

In addition, Jesus would suffer injustice. The perfectly holy Son of God was falsely accused of sin, "so a second time they called the man who had been blind, and said to him, 'give glory to God; we know that

this man is a sinner” (John 9:24), rebellion, “¹³Pilate summoned the chief priests and the rulers and the people, ¹⁴and said to them, ‘you brought this man to me as one who incites the people to rebellion” (Luke 23:13-14), and blasphemy, “the Jews answered Him, ‘for a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God”” (John 10:33).

Finally, Jesus would suffer physical pain. We will not go into the details here, since we will have that opportunity when we study the crucifixion itself, but suffice it to say that Jesus was well aware of the physical pain that awaited Him. Yet, this was not the entire story. Luke made certain to include Jesus’ words that on “the third day He will rise again” (v. 33). Jesus wanted His disciples to not be despondent. Eventually, when these events happened, He wanted His disciples to fall back on the truth that He would rise again.

Some have argued that this was a prophecy after the fact. That is, that Jesus did anticipate His death in a general way, but that the details of the prediction were added later by Luke (and by implication, the other evangelists as well). There is no biblical reason to accept such an argument. Jesus often knew specific details that as a mere human, He could have no way of knowing.

“However, so that we do not offend them, go to the sea and throw in a hook, and take the first fish that comes up; and when you open its mouth, you will find a shekel. Take that and give it to them for you and Me” (Matthew 17:27).

¹⁷The woman answered and said, ‘I have no husband.’ Jesus said to her, ‘you have correctly said, “I have no husband”; ¹⁸for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly”” (John 4:17-18).

Jesus knew exactly what was coming. He did not have some foggy premonition of His death. The crucifixion had been determined in eternity. The willingness of Jesus to fulfill the commission He had been given is the greatest example of love recorded in human history, for “Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end” (John 13:1).

The Perception

Though Jesus spoke clearly, and though he had spoken so before, the disciples still could not grasp the meaning of what He said. Luke emphasized their confusion by making a threefold statement of their lack of perception, “the disciples understood none of these things, and the meaning of this statement was hidden from them, and they did not comprehend the things that were said” (v. 34). They “understood none of these things” the “meaning of this statement was hidden from them” and “they did not comprehend” the meaning of the things that were said.

Despite the Old Testament teachings, and the very words of Jesus, the disciples were to enter Jerusalem completely unaware of what was to occur. Though the disciples understood much of the doctrine of what Jesus taught, and even were able to unpack His parables to gain their meaning, this teaching was beyond them. Their preconceived notions of the Messiah could not be overcome.

But let us not be too quick to judge the disciples. Even today, with two thousand years of time and historical evidence, sadly millions of people still do “not comprehend the things that were said” (v. 34). But that does not mean that the words of Jesus were irrelevant or useless. The Holy Spirit would remind the disciples of this, and other, conversations later. “These things His disciples did not understand at the first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written of Him, and that they had done these things to Him” (John 12:16).

Takeaways

As we reflect on the commitment of Jesus to fulfill the mission for which He was sent, let us be thankful and renew in ourselves an equal commitment to fulfill our mission as children of God.