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PRESBYTERIAN

## MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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Volume 16 Issue 15

April 16, 2017

### The Story of Easter

One of the favorite tools that Christ frequently utilized in His teaching was the parable: “The Kingdom of God is like...” or “The Kingdom of heaven can be compared to...” And through His use of the parable, Christ enabled His disciples and the crowds to understand truth from a variety of angles... through their *sight, taste, touch, and experience!*

It is one thing to say that God loves his children, BUT to present God’s love as that of

- A father for a lost child- as in the Prodigal
- The passion of a woman for her lost dowry- as in the Lost Coin.

- The longing of a shepherd for a lost animal- as in the Lost Sheep.

is to magnify and so expand our understanding of God's love tenfold. Truly the parable was/is an effective tool for conveying truth!

In the spirit of the parable, the story of Easter can be viewed from many different vantage points, beginning with 1 Samuel 8. You might think, "That's the Old Testament! What does this have to say about Christ's death and resurrection?" That is a great question, for in fact the Old Testament has much to say about the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Remember that Christ told the Jews of His day:

John 5:39, "You search the [Old Testament] Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these [the Old Testament Scriptures] that bear witness of Me."

And then after His resurrection, Christ joined two disciples walking to Emmaus and stated this:

Luke 24:27, "And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures."

Accordingly, there will be much benefit in examining the Old Testament as we seek to understand The Story of Easter. Let's look at the story of Easter beginning with the witness of 1 Samuel.

1 Samuel 8:1-2, "And it came about when Samuel was old that he appointed his sons judges over Israel. Now the name of his first-born was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judging in Beersheba"

As this is the latter period of what is known as the Judges, we must understand the "judgeship" of Joel and Abijah in terms of the book of Judges. The office of Judge at the time of the book of Judges was a cross between a military leader and a shepherd. Not only were the judges called to serve as spiritual leaders and guides who were to direct God's people to undistracted devotion (cf. Gideon, Jephthah), BUT they also protected the people of God from foreign oppression. In the case of Samuel, his "protection" came as he reminded God's people of their responsibility to God (cf. 1 Samuel 7:15-17). For truly, it was when the people were faithful to the covenant that they enjoyed God's protection!

And thus, as Samuel appointed his two sons as judges, and they were strategically positioned in the South, what he actually did was to ordain two protectors of Israel!

1 Samuel 8:3, "His sons, however, did not walk in his ways, but turned aside after dishonest gain and took bribes and perverted justice"

In other words, far from being a "man of God" as was their father, Joel and Abijah were

worthless fellows who lived *off* the people rather than *for* the people! And thus, rather than protecting and nurturing God's people, they adulterated their position for the sake of dishonest gain! And thus, we read of the petition that the leaders of Israel made to Samuel.

1 Samuel 8:4-5, "Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah; and they said to him, 'Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king for us to judge us LIKE ALL THE NATIONS.'"

They essentially said, "*Listen Samuel, as you already have appointed king-like figures in the land via your sons, do it again. But this time, appoint ones who are powerful and strong, 'LIKE THE NATIONS!'*"

It is this latter phrase that I want you to note, "like the nations". The description of "...like the nations..." was not simply an illustration of the kind of protection the people wanted. It was a description of the kind of king and nation that they wanted. In fact, notice that after Samuel described life under a "king like the nations" in very negative terms (1 Samuel 8:10-18), the people were undaunted.

1 Samuel 8:19-20, "Nevertheless, the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel, and they said, 'No, but there shall be a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.'"

The clear focus is that God's people were tired of living as the covenant people of God they wanted to look more cosmopolitan, more like the nations that surrounded them!

What is amazing about this is that the impetus for the people's request — national security — was something they would enjoy if only they followed the Lord! Yet clearly, they were tired of living as the covenant people of God. They wanted to worship Baal and the many other gods of the nations. They wanted to do their own thing, free from the "tyranny" of God. And so, they opted for the next best thing: A Protector and a Country Like the Nations. This is what prompted their request for a king. And yet, with this request came the horrible rejection of God!

1 Samuel 8:6, "But the thing was displeasing in the sight of Samuel when they said, 'Give us a king to judge us.' And Samuel prayed to the Lord."

At first glance, the request of the people appears to have been a rejection of Samuel. Again, Samuel was the God-ordained prophet in the land, and thus he was the one through whom God had led and would lead His people- he was their Judge! The fact that the people asked for a king, never mind the excuse about Samuel's sons, clearly and understandably would have been interpreted as a rejection of Samuel! In fact, put yourself in the situation here and you can almost see and hear it. The elders of Israel have gathered to discuss a very pressing concern:

*"We're tired of serving the Philistines and the Canaanites. The cycle over the past*

*couple generations has got to end: first freedom, then oppression, then freedom, and then oppression!”*

*“You know what is needed... a king!... NOT like Samuel who simply speaks the word of the Lord all the time or his two worthless sons who ‘take and take’ and give nothing in return. We NEED someone with strength and power: someone who (1) would not stand for the atrocities of the Philistines, (2) would interpret any foreign threat as a threat against himself and the nation, (3) who would respond to the Canaanites with force, and (4) who would rally the people and lead them to victory!”*

*“Now this may come as quite a shock to Samuel... yet Samuel ought NOT to stand in the way of our protection and welfare! WE NEED A KING LIKE THE NATIONS!”*

And Samuel, shocked and beside himself, goes to the Lord in prayer only to be surprised by God’s answer.

1 Samuel 8:7-8, “And the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, BUT THEY HAVE REJECTED ME from being king over them. Like all the deeds which they have done since the day that I brought them up from Egypt even to this day- in that they have forsaken Me and served other gods- so they are doing to you also”

Don’ miss it! The people’s request for a king was nothing less than a rejection of God! Clearly, as Samuel ministered *in the name of God*, it wasn’t Samuel who the people rejected; it wasn’t even his ungodly sons! Rather, it was the Lord Himself whom the people rejected, which is quite amazing! For while it is true that the time of the Judges was a time of lawlessness in which “Everyone did what was right in their own eyes” (cf. Judges 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25)- and thus a time in which the people suffered; however, it also is clear that during this time GOD was the King of Israel.

In the euphoria following his victory over the Midianites, Gideon was asked to rule as a king. Notice his response:

Judges 8:23, “But Gideon said to them, ‘I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the Lord shall rule over you.’”

He said, the Lord is your only King!

Accordingly, as God was the King in Israel, the people’s request for a “king like the nations” was nothing less than a REJECTION OF GOD! Now in this context, notice God’s surprising response.

1 Samuel 8:9, “Now then, listen to their voice; however, you shall solemnly warn them and tell them of the procedure of the king who will reign over them”

This is an important command on the part of God! While, the people wanted a king in rejection of God, this request at first would prove to be quite costly and even detrimental to the nation (cf. vv. 10-22). The people's desire truly was for evil. Nevertheless, God brought about good through this rejection by establishing the monarchy and using it to bless His people. Through the office of the king, God would

- Protect His people.
- Lead and govern Israel.
- Shepherd and care for His flock, Jeremiah 3:15.
- Establish the nation.
- Encourage the people with regard to the worship of God.
- Preserve the righteous seed.

That, family of God, is what Easter is all about! It is a rebellious and obstinate people rejecting God to His face, and yet God, in His grace and mercy, working through the rejection to effect the salvation of the very ones who had refused Him!

If you doubt this, let's look at Luke 23:13-19. This passage is late in the trial that Christ underwent prior to His crucifixion.

Luke 23:13-16, "And Pilate summoned the chief priests and the rulers and the people, and said to them, 'You brought this man to me as one who incites the people to rebellion, and behold, having examined Him before you, I have found no guilt in this man regarding the charges which you make against Him. No, nor has Herod, for he sent Him back to us; and behold, nothing deserving death has been done by Him. I will therefore punish Him and release Him.'"

By the time of this text, Christ has already been:

- Betrayed by Judas.
- Arrested in the Garden.
- Falsely tried by the Sanhedrin.
- Sent to Pilate, Herod, and now back to Pilate again.

Here we read of Pilate's presentation of what he called "an innocent" and "good man." With that, notice the petition and rejection of Christ.

Luke 23:17-19, "Now he [Pilate] was obliged to release to them at the feast one prisoner. But they [the crowd, cf. Matthew 27:20] cried out all together, saying, 'Away with this man, and release for us Barabbas!' (He was one who had been thrown into prison for a certain insurrection made in the city, and for murder.)"

For the sake of placating the Jews, the Roman Governor of Palestine established a practice at

this time in which they would release any criminal the Jews requested. Here the people of God, at the behest of the Jewish Leadership, requested the release of a man by the name of Barabbas!

This is significant because Barabbas, according to the Gospel accounts was:

- A Murderer, Luke 23:19, 25.
- An Insurrectionist, Luke 23:19, 25!
- A Thief, John 18:40.

At first glance it would seem that Barabbas was nothing more than just another criminal caught by Rome. However, reason through the evidence with me. Barabbas was a murderer and yet if Barabbas was guilty of murdering another Jew, there is no doubt that the chief priests and elders would NOT have encouraged the crowd to ask for his release (cf. Matthew 27:20), to kill a fellow Jew was a major crime in Israel! From this we conclude that Barabbas undoubtedly was charged with the murder of a *foreigner, a gentile, most likely a Roman!*

Barabbas also was an insurrectionist. An “insurrectionist,” according to the use of this word here and in Mark 15:7, is someone who had participated in an organized revolt against God-given authority. Now again, because it would be unthinkable for the Sanhedrin to encourage the crowd to request the release of a criminal who had rebelled against Jewish law and authority, the description here had to have referenced an uprising against Rome! In fact, Luke records that the uprising occurred “...in the city” (Luke 23:19). And thus, to say that the man the Sanhedrin wanted was an “insurrectionist” implies that he was someone who had rebelled NOT against Israel, BUT against Rome!

Barabbas was a thief. Again, if Barabbas was guilty of robbing from another Jew, there is no doubt that the chief priests and elders would NOT have encouraged the crowds to ask for his release (cf. Matthew 27:20). From this we conclude lastly that Barabbas was charged with robbing from a foreigner.

Separated from the whole, the evidence doesn't tell us much. Yet placed together we get a good picture of who and what Barabbas was! Clearly, Barabbas was NOT simply one of the many criminals in Israel who broke the law for a living. RATHER, he most likely was a Zealot who had participated in an attack on Rome in which Romans were killed and property stolen. In this regard, there could be no better candidate on the part of the Jewish leadership by which to entice the people to reject Christ! Leon Morris gives us this description of Barabbas:

Barabbas was evidently a member of what we would call the resistance movement, judging from the reference to insurrection. No doubt the murder (cf. Acts 3:14) had taken place in connection with this uprising. (Morris, 2008, p. 353)

From this we see the significance of the petition in this text. When it came time for choosing between two Messianic figures/two Saviors:

1. The seemingly passive and non-violent carpenter, named Jesus and
2. The rebellious and violent patriot, named Barabbas, the people here- just as their forefathers in the days of Samuel- chose a "SAVIOR" LIKE THE NATIONS!

And yet just like in the days of Samuel, the people's rejection of Christ ultimately lead to their salvation! Christ was hung on the cross! Towards the end of Christ's crucifixion we read:

John 19:28-30, "After this, Jesus, knowing that all things had already been accomplished, in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, 'I am thirsty.' A jar full of sour wine was standing there; so they put a sponge full of the sour wine upon a *branch of hyssop*, and brought it up to His mouth [this was a common drink given to satisfy the thirst of a crucified victim and so prolong their suffering]. When Jesus therefore had received the sour wine, He said, 'It is finished!' And He bowed His head, and gave up His spirit."

Notice the last statement Christ made while hanging on the cross prior to His death, "It is finished" [τετέλεσται (*tetelestai*)!]. What does this mean? The expression actually was taken from the field of finance and commerce!

At the time of Christ business was conducted in a similar fashion as today. A company/individual places a large order for widgets. The supplying company, the wholesaler-ships the widgets to the retail store, which shipment is soon followed by a bill. When the retail store pays the bill, the wholesale company issues a receipt.

Now, in Christ's day when the retail store failed to pay the bill, the owner would be thrown into debtor's prison where he would remain until the bill was paid! Now upon his prison door, a document known as "a certificate of debt" would be hung which detailed the debt as well as the company/person that was owed. If in the course of time a relative or friend paid the debt (or through his slave labor the prisoner himself was able to satisfy his obligation), the Roman official would take the "certificate of debt" and write a statement across it so that the individual could never again be accused of not paying the bill... τετέλεσται (*tetelestai*)- *paid in full!*

It was these exact words that Christ uttered on the cross right before He "gave up His spirit"- which means His life was NOT taken from Him; RATHER He laid it down, He offered it up as a payment! What therefore did Christ mean by this expression? To what is this in reference? Picking up on this last statement that Christ made on the cross, Paul explained the significance in his letter to the Colossian church.

Colossians 2:13-14, "And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions [how did He do this?], having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us *and* which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of

the way, having nailed it to the cross.”

Every time we sin we accumulate a debt to God that can only be paid for by our death.

Romans 6:23a, “For the wages of sin is death...”

Because God made us, He has the right to our love, affection, devotion, and service. When we fail to render this to the Lord in the slightest degree, the Bible calls this sin. In this regard, the wages/payment of this sin is death! Because of this, we could never pay the debt we owe the Lord on account of our sin. And God knows this!

This is why Christ:

- He became a man- that is what Christmas is all about!
- Lived a perfect life (He never sinned)!
- And then, as in the Old Testament sacrificial system, offered Himself as a sacrifice in the place of the sinner!

When John the Baptist saw Jesus serving in His office as the Christ, John said:

John 1:29b, “...Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”

That is why on the cross, right before He died, Jesus spoke these words, “*It is finished!... τετέλεσται (tetelestai)... Paid in full!*” Though rejected by the masses, King Jesus nevertheless offered the payment for our sin!

It was through the people’s rejection, that God wrought their salvation! This is the story of Easter!

Now clearly, not everybody has their debt of sin paid for, so how can a person have their “certificate of debt” removed? Simply by bowing their knee in prayer and asking God to apply Christ’s perfect record to their own life.

John 1:12, “But as many as received Him [and so His sacrifice as their own], to them He gave the right to become children of God...”

Ask Christ this day to apply the sacrifice that He offered to your account, and you will know the glorious life of being free from the debt of sin! Christ said this, speaking of His sacrifice on behalf of the sinner:

John 8:36, “If therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed.”

This means that you will never be enslaved by sin again!



If you are one this day who already knows this freedom, then let this sacrifice bind you ever more to the love, service, and glory of the Lord such that you never again live under the threat of death on account of your sin!

Galatians 5:1, “It was for freedom that Christ set us free; THEREFORE [what ought we to do?] keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.”

Never again should we relate to God as if He were Zeus! Stand fast in the blood of the Lamb — never wavering, questioning, or downplaying the importance of His most glorious gift! In this regard, may our confidence and strength be that which Paul describes in Romans 8.

Romans 8:1, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

Now that all your sins have been paid for, give yourself to the love, service, and glory of the Lord! Yet at times, our faith is weak and we stumble. Speaking of the blood of the Lamb of Passover which is still true today, Spurgeon wrote this:

Remember, it is God’s seeing the blood that is the true reason for our being spared. Here is comfort for us when the eye of faith is dim, for God’s eye is still the same. (Spurgeon, 1990, p. April 16)

## References

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