

430 An Innocent Party

This weekend we thank God our Father afresh for Jesus' death and resurrection, by which the great building that is the Gospel itself was completed after 4,000 years of promise and expectation.

It is humbling to remember that the Foundation Stone of this Gospel building was laid even before Creation took place, with the appointment of "the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13.8). We bow in awe at this extraordinary truth, that even "back then", before Time existed, the Son accepted the Father's bidding to be "the seed of the woman" and "the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world" – before there were "the heavens and the earth", or any people, or any sin needing to be taken away (from Genesis 1.1a, 26-28; 3.15 / John 1.29).

Because Time itself is created, Almighty God Himself is above Time, outside it, beyond it. (C S Lewis likened this to an author writing a novel, who can enter and leave any part of the story he is writing as and when he wishes). This means, in ways we cannot really grasp for we are so Time-bound, that the Lamb truly was slain as far as God the Father was concerned, before the "In the beginning" of Genesis 1.1. It shows that the Gospel, with all its grace and mercies, was no hastily-concocted "Plan B" in the evening of that doleful day in the Garden when deception and sin had crept into Creation with such devastating consequences. God was not surprised, He was not caught out, and thankfully He never is.

After this entrance of sin, at once there came the first, crucial, shedding of innocent blood of animals, from which God made "coats of skins" (Genesis 3.21). These coats could only ever be temporary, token, coverings for sin for Adam and Eve, but they did express two vital principles.

Firstly, sin matters. It results in spiritual and physical death, this death involving the shedding of the sinner's own blood in punishment for his or her sins (eg., Romans 6.23a). Now crucially this death is nothing to do with extinction, (which is what the atheists rely on when physical death comes their way), but is instead a permanent, conscious severance of the sinner from fellowship with Almighty God our holy Creator, which the sinner is unable to reverse from his or her side (eg. Luke 16.19-31). This severance exists in this present, earthly stage of our lives, and, if unaddressed, will continue in the next stage of our lives, in eternity after

physical death (egs., Psalm 51.5 / John 3.3-8,35-36 / Romans 5.12,18-19 / Ephesians 2.1-7).

Secondly, sin must always be paid for, either by the blood of the sinner, or by the blood of an “innocent party” shed voluntarily on behalf of the sinner, and in place of the sinner’s own blood being shed (egs., Leviticus 17.11 / Hebrews 9.22b).

(If people understood these two solemn principles more clearly, as used to be the case, what a difference it would make to the saving of souls).

Now in Gospel terms that sinless “innocent party” had to be a human being, whose blood when shed could atone for the sins of other human beings; animal blood could never achieve this atoning (eg., Hebrews 10.4). But here was the nub of the problem: after the Fall there was no such thing as a sinless, innocent human being on the earth! – “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3.23).

The only Solution was for God to become a sinless Man Himself, and that of course is just what has happened. The “Innocent Party” is Christ Himself, the Lamb of God, slain before the foundation of the world to take away the sin of the world (egs., II Corinthians 5.21 / Hebrews 4.15 / Romans Chapter 5). Truly, Christ – “is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him” (Hebrews 7.24-27).

This is the context of Jesus’ simple words at the Last Supper, “Take, eat, this is my body”, and with the cup, “Drink ... for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (from Matthew 26.26-28). After His betrayal and sham trial, Jesus’ innocent blood was then shed in gruesome reality. Repentant sinners can now rightly claim before God the Father that this wondrous deed by Jesus atones for their own sins. By God’s grace full forgiveness then flows, and the fellowship-life with Him, for which we were created in the first place, is fully restored – for both now, and eternity (egs., Romans 5.1-2; 8.32-39).

As we contemplate again the beauty and simplicity of God the Father’s grace given to us in Christ, we are surely “lost in wonder, love and praise”, as we sing in Charles Wesley’s great hymn. For truly, “with his stripes we are healed ... the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (from Isaiah 53.5-6).

And now, what is more and Hallelujah - “the Lord is risen, He is risen indeed!”.

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