

February 19, 2012

Galatians 4:1-7 / Revelation 13:5-10 / Ephesians 1:9-10

Redemption Planned, Redemption Accomplished, Redemption Applied

Over the past three weeks we've been seeing a gradual progression take place in our text -- a progression in time. For in this text we see that the plan of God is worked out with great precision -- at just the right time / and in just the right way -- through the sovereign oversight of God.

As verse 11 tells us, God has a **"plan"** and **"works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will."**

That's what Paul, speaking for God, wants us to know. Life is not random. Nor are the events we experience. The joys and victories and pains and sorrows of this life are not merely aimless, arbitrary, unrelated, purposeless events! They don't just "happen."

They are directed and overseen by a God who has an overarching plan and uses all the events of history (arbitrary as they may sometimes seem to us) -- so that in the end -- everything conforms perfectly, **"with the purpose of His will,"** and furthers the plan He established before time began.

"In ALL things," says Paul, **"God works for the good of those who love Him, who are the called according to His purpose."** And he means in ALL things -- the good as well as the bad.

And though we sometimes miss it, because we lack the faith or the trust or the spiritual insight needed to see it, God does work all things out with sovereign precision so that each one is made to **"conform with the purpose of His will."**

And not only does He work it out to conform to His will, He does so with precise timing.

We get a few glimpses into that when we read passages like Gen. 10:14, where the LORD tells Abraham (in relation to the promise to give him a son): **"I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son."**

Before it ever happened God had set a specific date and a specific time when He would return and perform the promised miracle in Sarah's womb, and she would have a son -- just as God planned and purposed and promised.

Or take Gal. 4:4, where speaking of the fulfillment of God's promises to send the Christ, Paul says, "**But when the time had fully come (the precise and perfect time), God sent His Son...**"

There was no randomness or arbitrariness in the timing of Christ's coming -- none whatsoever. He came at exact time God had chosen and determined beforehand in eternity past.

The same can be said of Rom. 5:6, where Paul says: "**At just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.**" / Or again in Acts 17:26, or Matt. 24:36 where Jesus says of His return: "**No one knows the day of the hour, neither the angels, nor even the Son, but only the Father,**" says Jesus. But don't miss the point. Even though we and the angels and even Christ during His incarnation didn't know the time of His return, the Father knew.

He had already determined and knew the exact day and hour (down to the minute and second) when Christ would return. It's a mystery to us, never to Him.

Even in regard to His death, Jesus says in Matt. 26:18: "**My appointed time is near.**" The sand (we could say) in the hourglass of God was running down to the precisely pre-determined moment when Jesus would lay down His life as a ransom for many.

It was all pre-determined in advance and worked out in time so as to conform perfectly to "**the purpose of His will.**"

So I ask you: Is anything left to chance? No, my friends, nothing. Because, if it were, it wouldn't be the plan of an all-knowing / all-powerful / and sovereign "**King of the ages,**" as He is called in Rev. 15:3 -- the King of time.

In fact, if anything were "left to chance," Paul could never write in v. 11: "**In Him we were chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will...**" But that's jumping ahead to next week's message!

So what have we seen so far? We've seen the Father, in eternity past (out of sheer grace and unmerited love and His sovereign good pleasure and will) chose and predestine certain individuals to adoption as sons and the holiness (or fruit of sanctification) that results.

We've seen the Son, at the perfect and appointed time in history -- "*at just the right time*" -- go to the cross to purchase and secure in full the redemption of those people and thereby, "the forgiveness of all their sins."

And we also saw that the Holy Spirit applies that grace of redemption and forgiveness so that those "chosen" individuals are made alive in Christ and joined to Him by faith and spiritual union.

But that's not all. Because today we are also told that to those particular individuals, God has also: "***Made known the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment -- to bring all things in heaven, and on earth, together under one head, even Christ.***"

So, what do verses 9-10 teach us? **FIRST**, they teach us how important it is to remember that God is still in the process of working out in time and history the details of His plan of redemption -- and that He has made us, and what we do -
- a part of that plan!

It's true. What we as individuals do is like one more little piece of the puzzle being put into place, regardless of how insignificant we might see our contribution to His plan to be. / A plan which will only be "***put into effect***" (in its complete and divinely intended form) when "the times have reached their fulfillment," or, when everything that still needs to fall in to place, has finally fallen into place -- including the role we play.

Listen: God uses each and every one of us -- in our own unique way -- to BE a part and DO our part in bringing His glorious plan to its ultimate conclusion.

He DOES NOT carry out His will by going around us or circumventing us. For as people whom He chose and predestined to be in Christ He has actually woven each one of us into the fabric of His plan.

We have a pre-ordained part to play in His plan for the ages -- a part we need to take very seriously. Because there are people to be ministered to, and people to be reached, and WE -- by virtue of being "chosen" -- have been chosen to minister to and reach them.

You see, He didn't just chose us to be holy and blameless in Christ / or predestine us simply to enjoy the benefits of adoption as sons! He also graced us with power and the knowledge of His will and the gifts of the Holy Spirit as He chooses to apportion them / so that we might not only KNOW His will, but do our part to CARRY OUT His will (or plan).

That's why God has commanded us to do certain things, and abstain from doing other things? That's why He has commissioned us to, "Go and makes disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them everything He has commanded us."

Why? Because in doing so we are carrying out our part in His plan for the ages -- our pre-determined part in it. That's what Paul means, when he says in chapter 2, v.10: ***"For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works -- which God prepared in advance for us to do."***

Before we ever came to Christ in faith: God had already ***"prepared in advance"*** the "good works" He would have us do. And not just ***"good works,"*** but good works that bring about a piece of His plan which He purposed in Christ. We were (in a very real sense) "drafted" to fill a specific role!

You see, if God's ultimate purpose was merely the salvation of souls so that they could go to heaven when they died He may have told us to preach to all people or make converts, but He wouldn't have commanded us to, ***"baptize them"*** and ***"make disciples of them"*** and ***"teach them everything He commanded"*** / and tell us there were "good works" He had ***"prepared in advance for us to do."***

It's those things that assure us that He has an even higher purpose for us than merely going to heaven! The purpose (or I should say, the honor) of being used to bring about His perfect plan for the ages!

Until we grasp that, we will never see that everything we do in our lives is full of meaning and purpose and significance and eternal value -- because God is using IT and US (be it in a small way or big way) to bring about the mystery of His will which He purposed in Christ!

In fact, that's why GOD (when He saves us), makes known to US the "mystery of His will." So that we might be so stirred and moved by it and the fact that we are privileged to have a part in it that we would pour ourselves into doing our part -- in whatever big or small way He chooses.

Then **SECONDLY**, if we are to do our part in carrying out His plan for the ages we must know what that overall plan is! We must understand, ***"the mystery of His will, which He purposed in Christ," and "has made known to us."*** (v. 9). We must have an idea of the big picture, before we can focus on the smaller details.

And thankfully, to keep us from guessing, Paul tells us what that big picture or overarching purpose is v. 10b. For there he tells us it is: ***"to bring all things in heaven and on earth, together under one head, even Christ."***

That's God's ultimate purpose in redemption: To unite EVERYTHING in heaven and on earth under one and only one head (one Leader, King or Lord) -- the Lord Jesus Christ. That's why I can say that our individual salvation is NOT the ultimate purpose of God in redemption.

And that's ALSO why Paul can go on to say in chapter 4, v. 4: ***"There is one body and one Spirit -- just as you were called to one hope when you were called -- one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is over all, and through all and in all."***

Because that, according to Paul, is, ***"the mystery of God's will,"*** that had been ***"hidden from generations past,"*** but has now been, ***"made known to us, through the apostles,"*** who had it revealed to them, ***"through the Spirit."*** God's intention, "in Christ" and "through Christ," was ALWAYS to unite all things and all peoples everywhere, under one Lord / one King / one Master / one Savior / Mediator / and Redeemer -- the exalted and reigning and glorified Lord Jesus.

Paul even elaborates on this same thing again in chapter 3, verses 5-6. where he says of that same mystery: ***"This mystery IS that through the Gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together in the promise of Jesus Christ."***

THAT is what the OT believers had never understood! That from the very beginning it was ALWAYS GOD'S PLAN to include believing Gentiles together with believing Jews in ONE BODY -- the BODY we call the Church.

Not two bodies. Not two separate peoples or entities. Not Israel as a separate entity from the Church, but believing Israel and believing Gentiles as the Church. The Gentiles, like branches of a tree, grafted into Israel, to make one olive tree and not two (Rom. 11:17-24).

You see, contrary to the widespread teachings of dispensationalism, God ***DOES NOT*** have one plan for the Jews and another for the Gentiles. NOR has He ever planned to save Israel apart from faith in CHRIST / or the GOSPEL / or apart from the ONE BODY we call the CHURCH!

Few things have done more harm to bringing about "the mystery of God's will" (as presented here in Ephesians and Romans) than the dispensational teaching that ISRAEL and the CHURCH are two entirely separate entities / and were always intended to be that way / and stay that way.

For as Paul assures us: God's will was always that ***"through the Gospel, the Gentiles are heirs together (equal heirs) with Israel, and members of His ONE body."*** Because on the cross, Christ did away with that which separated them into two! Not their ethnic heritage, but the Law!

As Paul says in Eph. 2:13ff: ***"But NOW in Christ Jesus, you who were once far away (you Gentiles) have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in His flesh the Law with its commandments and regulations."***

Then listen to what he says next (as if it weren't clear enough already): ***"His PURPOSE was to create in Himself ONE NEW MAN OUT OF THE TWO***

(ethnic Jews and ethnic Gentiles becoming ONE MAN or ONE BODY IN CHRIST) thus making peace, and in this ONE BODY (the Church) to RECONCILE BOTH OF THEM TO GOD through the CROSS, by which he put to death their hostility."

How it is that anyone could not see that, is beyond me. And it IS important that we see it! Because Paul's whole point is that the joining together of Jew and Gentile as ONE NEW MAN in the ONE BODY He calls the CHURCH -- ***IS "the mystery of His will,"*** which He, ***"purposed in Christ"*** and ***"will put into effect when the times have reached their fulfillment."***

God doesn't want the Jews to remain separate, or see themselves as separate, or different from saved Gentiles in any way! For in Christ there is ***"no longer Jew nor Gentile."*** (Gal. 3:28).

For on the cross God made ONE MAN or ONE BODY out of the TWO -- joining both believing Jew and believing Gentile as ONE MAN in the CHURCH universal and invisible.

You see, contrary to what so many people today teach (even in churches), God has NO SAVING PLAN apart from the CHURCH. The Church IS His plan to save!

It is not an unforeseen stop-gap measure, instituted by God until He can get back to His real love -- His chosen people -- the Jews. For as Paul tells us, those who are "chosen" to be "in Christ" are now His "chosen people" -- whether they be Jew or Gentile -- for there is no longer any difference! The CHURCH has become "the people of God" (or the Israel of God)! They are His real love!

Paul says as much in chap. 5 verse 25 of this very book, where we read: ***"Husbands, love you wives, just as Christ loved the CHURCH and gave His life for HER..."*** For the Church! Christ gave His life for the Church!

In the plan of God, the CHURCH was always the goal of redemption and the crowning achievement of His plan! A Church where all ethnic barriers dissolve away / and all racial prejudice would melt into nothingness / beginning with the prejudice the Jews had for the Gentiles and visa-versa.

How sad it is, then, that various sectors of the Church have actually sought (often with great effort): To DIVIDE and KEEP SEPARATED, what God, in "***the mystery of His will,***" has always intended to bring together and join as ONE in Christ.

Never do it, my friends! Paul couldn't be much clearer. Uniting all things, and all people's (including the Jews) together in Christ Jesus and in His ONE BODY of the Church has ALWAYS BEEN the ultimate purpose of God in His plan of redemption.

That's why Paul could call the Church (comprised of believing Jew and believing Gentile) "***the Israel of God***" in Gal. 6:16. Because the Church, and not Israel as a nation, is now the people of God / and the sons and daughters of Abraham / His precious, loved, holy and chosen people.

Which brings us to our LAST point: WHEN God will finally unite all things under Christ / and WHAT our role will be (if any) in making that plan become a reality.

And as far as the "***WHEN***" there is an almost universal consensus that it will happen in all its complete perfection when Christ returns. THAT is when "***the times will have reached their fulfillment,***" and THAT is when we will see, gathered before the throne of God, people from every tribe and tongue and people and nation dressed in the white robes (robes representing Christ's righteousness) and singing of His worth and His praises!

THAT is when "***every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.***" And do so with no concern whatsoever about the skin color of the person next to them / or their facial characteristics / or their ethnic heritage. None of that will matter! For in Christ they'll have become ONE.

And WHAT is our role (if any) in bringing that about? Our role is primarily twofold: Preach the Gospel and live the Gospel. It's to proclaim Christ, in love and with unwavering fidelity, as the only Lord, and the only way of salvation. / And HIS BODY the CHURCH as the ONE BODY in whom God wants to join together as ONE, all the peoples of the earth!

We must proclaim Christ as the CENTER of God's redemptive purposes, and the ONE in whom, and under who's LORDSHIP or HEADSHIP, God has determined to join all people's together. Like Peter we must continue to proclaim:

"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven, given among men, by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

And I know how abhorrent that sounds in our inclusive, *"anyone's opinion is as good as anyone else's"* culture, it is true. Yet you cannot read this book and fail to see that there is no other path to salvation except the one that goes through the cross and leads to Christ -- in whom and through whom and under whom -- God plans to unite all people as ONE.

As much as we are pressured (like the early church) to admit there is more than one way to God -- we must humbly & lovingly refuse. For to do so is to undermine the redemptive plan of God and thwart, ***"the mystery of His will which He purposed in Christ... to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head"*** -- the headship or Lordship of Christ.

Yet it's never enough to simply **preach** the Gospel. Because we must also (and always) live the Gospel.

And if God's desire is to break down all racial and ethnic and religious barriers -- in and through Christ -- and unite people of every race under Him and in His one body (the church), then we must seek to rid ourselves of all racial prejudice, and harmful or divisive ethnic pride, and welcome people of every tribe and tongue and nation into our fellowship.

If you're a believer you will be standing and worshipping throughout eternity next to Asians / and Africans / and Hispanics / and Indians / and Jews / and Iranians / and Russians / and Caucasians / and tribes-people from the Amazon Basin -- people from every tribe and nation!

And LISTEN: ***What God wants His people to do now (as they wait for the times reach their fulfillment) is to seek to live out in our day what He will bring about in that day.***

That's what the Christians life objective is: To see what God wants then (that complete oneness of fellowship in Christ) and seek by the grace of God to begin living it out in the now.

Which for us includes: ridding ourselves of all prejudice and inviting people of every race and culture and ethnic background to join us in Christ.

And as we do so we must be blind to what separates us -- because in Christ, and as of the cross, those divisive things no longer exist!