

“More Than Just a Good Story”

Luke 13:31-35

Last week, in our Gospel lesson, we witnessed the devil tempting Jesus in the wilderness, which was the first act of Jesus’ ministry after His Baptism. But, as we saw last week, there was no chance that Jesus was going to do anything contrary to His Father’s divine will. He did not go out into the wilderness and risk failure. He went out there to be the Second Adam. He went out to be the opposite of Adam. Jesus especially was not going to do something so obviously wrong as to openly worship the devil; thereby destroying God’s plan of salvation.

Christ’s time in the wilderness allowed Himself to be at His physically weakest point and let Satan take his best shot at Him. But were those three temptations really Satan’s best shot? Remember that Satan is the great deceiver. He rarely works in open and obvious ways. He doesn’t just come right out with cloven hooves and horns. He comes as someone who can help. He likes to work behind the scenes and with half-truths and deception.

Last week, we saw how the devil used the very Word of God in an attempt to lead Jesus off course and thereby thwart the plan of salvation.

And when Jesus resisted the temptations, we are told that the devil “left him until an opportune time” [Lk. 4:13]. In our Gospel lesson today, was this plea of the Pharisees for Jesus to leave His appointed path to Jerusalem done as a further temptation for Jesus to save Himself rather than complete God’s plan of salvation? Was this now the opportune time that Satan had been waiting for?

Was Satan using these men, who may have been well-intentioned followers of Jesus, as we know some Pharisees were? I believe that it is not unreasonable to see Satan using them for his own malicious purposes by putting forth this hypocritical plea for Jesus to save Himself – thereby proving to be “a false prophet who seeks to avoid the suffering and martyrdom of the prophets [who came] before him (cf. 11:47-52)”¹. “For it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem,” as Jesus says.

I believe that this was a temptation of Satan, because it fits his pattern. Last week, we saw that he came after Jesus when Jesus was at His weakest point – physically exhausted and hungry. Satan loves to tempt us when we are weak.

But he also loves to tempt us when we are strong and able, and he loves to work behind the scenes and convince us to trust in our own strengths and thereby lead us away from the path God desires for us. The chance for Jesus to save Himself fits Satan’s pattern. He wanted to keep

¹Just, *Luke*, 559.

Jesus from being that final lamb of sacrifice. As the prophet Isaiah wrote, “It was the Lord’s will to crush Him (the Christ) and cause Him to suffer.” We must remember that Jesus died according to God’s plan and God’s time frame, not Satan’s. Satan was not and is not in charge of this world.

And Satan failed again. Jesus ignored this plea, ignored this warning, and faithfully continued His ministry even though He knew the path He was on would lead Him directly to Jerusalem and the cross of Calvary. Jesus never compromised His Father’s will or took the easy way out.

His ministry was solely focused on one event, one sacrifice, one task that had to be accomplished. He says, “I must keep going today and tomorrow and the day following.” I believe there is a strong connection to the reference of three days – today, tomorrow, and the day following – with Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter morning. As He says, “the third day I finish my course.”

Christ’s ministry was not a series of coincidences and fateful chance meetings. There was one event, one sacrifice, one task to be accomplished. Everything happened according to the will of God. Luke is very deliberate about this in his Gospel. Luke tells us that Jesus was born in the Spring at the time that lambs were born in Israel. We are told that Jesus died at 3:00 in the afternoon on the day of Preparation for the Passover. At 3:00 in the afternoon on that day of Preparation, the Passover lambs were being killed. The blood of the Passover lamb is what rescued

the Israelites from death in Egypt and ultimately freed them from their slavery.

Jesus is the real Passover lamb who freed the world from death and our slavery to sin. Jesus is the final prophet who must die in Jerusalem. But Jesus is more than just a prophet who healed the sick and drove out demons. He is the Lamb of sacrifice. He is our high priest who offered that perfect sacrifice, and has brought about a reality greater than the Temple.

The reality of Christ is that His ministry, death, and resurrection provides us with more than just a good story this time of year. His perfect life was real. His death was real. All of this happened at a specific point in time. All of this happened according to the specific plan of salvation that God first shared with Adam in the Garden after his fall into sin.

Christ fulfilled His Father's plan of salvation in the exact time and in the exact manner in which God determined it would be. Likewise, the outcome of your life is not a series of coincidences and fateful chance meetings either. The day and time of your birth was in God's plan. The day and time you are called out of this life is in God's plan. The day and time of Christ's return and the resurrection of all flesh is in God's plan.

All of human history has revolved around and has focused on that one event, that one sacrifice, that one task being accomplished. And there was nothing that could prevent Christ from going forward today, tomorrow, and the third day finishing His course. Amen.