

Is the Cross a Coincidence?

April 15, 2014

Northside Baptist Holy Week

²⁶While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body."²⁷ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you;²⁸ for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.²⁹ I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."³⁰ When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

³⁶Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray."³⁷ He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated.³⁸ Then he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me."³⁹ And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want." (Matt. 26: 26-30, 36-39)

My wife Rochelle constantly runs into people she knows where ever we seem to be. We were on vacation in Washington D.C. 2 years ago and she saw a teacher she works with from Andover. 1500 miles away from home and she runs into someone from just down the road. It seems unlikely in a city of over 4 million people that it would happen but it did. I have become accustomed to it. I have learned to plan for it. When we go shopping I always add at least an hour to the estimated length of our trip to accommodate these meetings of coincidence. You know what I mean...meetings of coincidence are not meetings of nodding acquaintance. There is conversation, catching up, looking at the endless cache of pictures now conveniently stored in the phone. Coincidence is the unexplainable, the unlikely, and the ungodly! Maybe I should say un-God –like!

Here's the question I want you to consider today. *Is the cross a coincidence?* You see, coincidence may be a big part of the world we live in but it has no place in the Kingdom of God. I am convinced that every action of God is anticipated, conceived and planned to the fullest for the expressed purpose of bringing about the Kingdom of God! Each of God's actions is carefully considered and calculated "In the beginning." Yesterday, Pastor Speer painted a wonderful picture of Holy Week and the full circle it takes from Jesus entering as King to his resurrection and acceptance as our once and forever King! Each and every act, each and every step of that week was conceived by God before even the conception of the world! What's more, those actions have been revealed to us, to those of us willing to listen, long before He ever brought about the fullness of time appropriate to the coming of Jesus!

Take for example the meal Jesus shares with His disciples. The Passover Meal is called a Seder. The word itself means order. In the order of the meal is revealed God's plan for redemption and each and every detail is exquisitely planned! In the beginning, outside of time, God could see the sinful

possibilities for this creation He made “in His own image and likeness!” Because of that possibility He reveals His willingness to free a people whom He chose not because of their faithfulness but because of their potential. He freed them for one reason, “that they might go into the wilderness and worship!” We know they were freed and that they were freed at great cost. There were trials, tears and terrible loss of life! They were passed over! Was this coincidence?

Before the chosen left for the wilderness, they were given instructions about how and when to worship. The instructions came in the form of a meal. Great choice right? If you feed them, they will follow! This meal, the Seder provided the order of their worship. It was to take place at the beginning of the year. Yes, God even changed the calendar! God knew God would redeem his people and wanted them to remember the redemption “in the beginning, just as he remembered it.” In the meal they would eat lamb, that which saved them before would sustain them again! They would consume four cups of beverage. Each cup would have a significance. The first would be to sanctify, the second to choose, the third to redeem and the fourth to praise. They would eat bitter herbs and salt water to remind them of the bitterness of their slavery and the tears that flowed from it. They would eat bread without yeast to remind them of how quickly God’s salvation comes and they would eat reclining to remind them of their freedom from bondage.

The meal was to be celebrated each year as a perpetual reminder. There was no option. It was a command in order that the people would learn. It was also more! It was a preparation. God knew that slavery from oppression was only one form of bondage. God knows that we are also slave to our own weakness and sin. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God! God knows that it is this slavery that will keep us from having a relationship with Him in eternity so from the beginning, God uses the lessons learned in freedom from slavery to establish the lesson we must learn to free us from sin! It is no coincidence that Jesus celebrates this meal as His last with the disciples! In Christ it is not a reminder, It is instead a completion of commandment, an act of obedience.

The disciples prepared the meal. They did so exactly as instructed. They sacrificed the lamb, they put the blood on the door, they prepared the meal and when they sat down, Jesus sat with them. While they were eating, Jesus took bread. He did not take a loaf of King’s Hawaiian, he took matza. He took the bread that was baked quickly with no yeast, with no sin. He took the bread baked with holes in it, with stripes on it and he broke it. In the beginning God knew that in the fullness of time he would need to send one with no sin, no blemish to redeem the ones filled with sin! God knew it would hurt the One so in the bread there are piercings to mark his. In the bread there are stripes to mark his. He takes this bread and says take, eat! This bread is the reminder that in the beginning there is a plan! That plan is to use the one which is closest to God to redeem the ones who have moved farthest from God. He takes the bread not at any point in the meal but at a carefully planned point so there can be no confusion.

Later, He takes the cup. Again not just any cup, but the third cup, the one consumed after the meal, after the cups of sanctification and choice, He takes the cup of redemption. He says, take this and drink. This is my blood which will be poured out for many for the forgiveness of sin! There is no coincidence here. The cup which has been a rehearsal for 1500 years is now consumed in the fullness of time! The cup which is drunk at the last supper is the cup that was prepared in the beginning.

Jesus tells us this in Matthew 25 when he says to those on his right hand, "come, now enter into the kingdom that was prepared for you before the foundation of the world!" As they drink the cup they drink redemption that only the sinless savior can give and they begin the fulfillment of God's plan for reconciliation through redemption. There is no coincidence in the meal. There is no doubt that God has orchestrated the events of the meal even to the timing of this meal. In the verses just before what was shared today, Jesus directs his disciples to the city and to a certain man. He is in control and he is executing the plan exactly as it has been discussed and decided.

Part of that plan includes betrayal. In the meal there is a place for remembering betrayal. In the bitter herbs and salt water that are served we are invited to remember the tears shed and the trial and torture that leads to the accomplishment of God's plan. The herbs are dipped into the bowl. Jesus dips into the bowl with Judas as they share tears of betrayal together. The rehearsal is over. The meal is complete. The plan is put into action and there is no turning back. The only requirement now is obedience.

For obedience there is no more powerful resource than prayer. Jesus goes to the garden at Gethsemane. From the time Jesus rides down from the Mount of Olives on Palm Sunday, he has known that he would end up here. It was the place He and His Father agreed upon "in the beginning." Nothing has been left to chance. The scriptures foretell this place. It is no accident. It is here that Jesus will be tested. He is in control but it is not his plan! It is here that love is at stake. Love is letting someone else have control of your life and then having the courage to trust them in what they do with it!

Jesus prays! Don't let it be according to the plan! I do not want to endure this pain. I do not want to endure this betrayal but I have known you from the beginning. I trust you! You are in control! It is no coincidence that this is the last lesson Jesus teaches us as we head toward the cross. He wants us to know that God is in control of the lives of those who love Him and choose to obey His will. He will lead them to where they need to be not for their glory but for His! It is God who has authored the steps of our lives. There are no coincidences.

So...what do you think? Is the cross a coincidence? Is Jesus death just some cosmic accident that took place 2000 years ago so we could come together tonight for punch and cookies? Step by step God lays out God's plan for our freedom. In creation we are created free. By our misuse of power we are made slaves to one another. God redeems us by God's mighty hand and frees us for worship but we worship other Gods! God anticipates this and in the fullness of time, after rehearsal after rehearsal, God sends the fulfillment of his teaching in the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Passover requires that the blood be spread on the door and the lintels of the door. This action forms a cross. The blood on the cross causes God to pass over our sins accepting His own sacrifice as sufficient for our redemption! The cross is part of the plan from the beginning.

To think the cross is a coincidence is to think creation is some giant cosmic joke. To think the cross is coincidence is to believe life exists as a random chance. To think the cross is coincidence is to accept that there is nothing in the universe greater than us and that we have the power to control our lives. To think the cross is coincidence is to deny the possibility that we can choose the love of God over the lure of the world!

The cross hangs today and an emblem of life! The author of life dedicated it in the beginning even before creation as a sign of love. The one who created us designed it knowing that in the fullness of time He would send His son, His only son to shed his blood on that cross which is the doorway to eternity for all who will be redeemed by Him. And that is no coincidence! Amen!