

Scandalous Plans – Easter prophecies

We tend to be very grounded in our faith in the Bible and that we believe that what it says is God's word to us. But perhaps we do not recognise, at times, that this is the most amazing document in the world from a scholarly and historical perspective.

But it is!

Jenny and I are currently running a small Alpha Group at our home on Tuesday evenings. Every time I watch the first of the Alpha talks I recognise again that this is all quite extra ordinary. This book – and particularly the New Testament – is the best attested collection of ancient documents known to mankind! And that is not just slightly, but by a massive margin. Oddly, no one ever doubts the authenticity of the other documents, but because of the challenges and offers made by the Good News they are consistently challenged by those who find it convenient to do so.

Here are the facts>>> *powerpoint side*

I think that it is good to be clear about this as we today look at the prophecies from the old Testament as they relate to the birth, life, death and Resurrection of Jesus. Because we are not dealing with unattested myths – no, we have facts written down by people who believed them to be facts. Indeed they believed it so strongly that many of them were willing to die defending those facts and proclaiming them to be true to the very end of their lives. So I think that we can trust them.

So what of these prophecies? Well I think that we know the ones about Jesus birth pretty well because we traditionally talk about them, read them and wonder at them just before Christmas.

- He would be born of a virgin – Isaiah 7:14
- He'd be born in Bethlehem - Micah 5:12
- He would be descended from lots of famous bible characters – Genesis, Numbers, 2 Sam
- He'd have to runaway to Egypt – Hosea 11:1
- Even the massacre of the infants – Jer 31:15

But that is just the beginning. There are lots more prophecies for us to consider and some of them are oddly obscure, like the one in Is 9:1-2 which suggests that he will preach in Galilee – in fact this lovely verse is part of that –

*The people walking in darkness . have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness
a light has dawned.*

But today we are thinking about the prophecies that relate to the events surrounding Easter.

Jesus was betrayed to the accusers and then the blood money paid to Judas was used to buy the potters field – these are tiny details gleaned from Psalms and Zechariah. They were not tiny detail to Judas of course, because this is a very sad episode in the redemption story. Some find this difficult to come to terms with, because they think that Judas was condemned by God to commit this sin and then to die eternally damned for it. But that is to misunderstand the foreknowledge of God. Indeed, it seems to me that Jesus himself acts quite tolerantly and even lovingly to his betrayer at the last supper. And I am sure that he was forgiven by Jesus along with everyone else as Jesus died on the cross, saying “forgive them for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23) – Judas problem was that he could not forgive himself!

Now there are lots of prophecies about the Easter story – please bear with me as I run through 18 of them. They are up on the screen if you want to follow all the references and I dare say that Kath could put this little chart up on line if you want to research them later.

1	Messiah would be falsely accused.	Psalm 35:11	Mark 14:57-58
2	Messiah would be silent before his accusers.	Isaiah 53:7	Mark 15:4-5
3	Messiah would be spat upon and struck.	Isaiah 50:6	Matthew 26:67
4	Messiah would be hated without cause.	Psalm 35:19 69:4	John 15:24-25
5	Messiah would be crucified with criminals.	Isaiah 53:12	Matthew 27:38 Mark 15:27-28
6	Messiah would be given vinegar to drink.	Psalm 69:21	Matthew 27:34 John 19:28-30
7	Messiah's hands and feet would be pierced.	Psalm 22:16 Zechariah 12:10	John 20:25-27
8	Messiah would be mocked and ridiculed.	Psalm 22:7-8	Luke 23:35
9	Soldiers would gamble for Messiah's garments.	Psalm 22:18	Luke 23:34 Matthew 27:35-36
10	Messiah's bones would not be broken.	Exodus 12:46 34:20	John 19:33-36
11	Messiah would be forsaken by God.	Psalm 22:1	Matthew 27:46
12	Messiah would pray for his enemies.	Psalm 109:4	Luke 23:34

13	Soldiers would pierce Messiah's side.	Zechariah 12:10	John 19:34
14	Messiah would be buried with the rich.	Isaiah 53:9	Matthew 27:57-60
15	Messiah would resurrect from the dead.	Psalm 16:10 49:15	Matthew 28:2-7 Acts 2:22-32
16	Messiah would ascend to heaven.	Psalm 24:7-10	Mark 16:19 Luke 24:51
17	Messiah would be seated at God's right hand.	Psalm 68:18 110:1	Mark 16:19 Matthew 22:44
18	Messiah would be a sacrifice for sin.	Isaiah 53:5-12	Romans 5:6-8

So, you might well say, what does this tell us about anything? Why would this information be useful? Well I think that it is useful just as a recognition that our faith is founded on some pretty amazing facts – but it is so much more than that!

For me the vital issue here is that through the veil of the imperfect vision of the prophets we can see that that none of this story of redemption was not foreseen by the Mighty God. Nothing took him by surprise. He stepped down to earth fully knowing the outcome. In Jesus, God cast off his immortality to be born as a tiny baby, vulnerable and utterly dependent upon his family. He grew up in the poor backwater of Nazareth and then lived the life of a homeless itinerant preacher, wandering through the wasteland from town to town. He lived as a man under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and leadership of the Father God. Eventually he was accused, flogged, crucified and died in the most horrible and unjust way imaginable.

And he did this in the full knowledge that this was what he was committing himself to in order to save the world – to save the people – to save you and me from the clutches of sin and death and hell – on this world and into eternity.

And he considered that to be absolutely worthwhile. He had no doubt. He just did it. He knew the cost before the moment of conception within the virgin Mary. He knew what he was committing to and he still did it without thought of his personal wellbeing. That was the quality of his love for you; for me!

These prophecies remind me that God is in charge. He always is! So when we go through really bad times we need to remember that God knows the end from the beginning. Sometimes that seems a bit annoying to me! But it is also a comfort,

as he walks alongside us through the darkest times in our lives.

There is one more important thing to say – the powers of darkness did not know! Even with the carefully constructed prophecies in God's Word Satan did not know what was coming. He thought that the cross was the defeat of God, but it was actually the utter defeat of evil. Evil does not know any more about the future than we do – so do not believe that it does. God is omnipotent and all knowing. Beware of any who claim to know the future! It is not true!

So, back to the last moments at the foot of the cross....

as Jesus life drew to a close, as he died on the cross, having taken the sin of the world upon his shoulders he quotes the psalm that declares his foreknowledge.

Matthew 27:46

46: About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?").

He is quoting from **Psalm 22** – it is a bit like prophesy in reverse! Jesus quotes a Psalm that starts in despair, but ends in triumph:

V1 starts "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

But then ends....

²⁷ All the ends of the earth

will remember and turn to the LORD,
and all the families of the nations
will bow down before him,.....

³¹ They will proclaim his righteousness,
declaring to a people yet unborn:

He has done it!

So God's plan of salvation was not a plan that might or might not have worked out – God is not like that – he knew it would work! But he also knew the cost – it was going to be horrific! So when Jesus dies he cries out "it is finished". It was the same triumph and reflects "He has done it!"

Hallelujah! He did it for us! Praise him forever!

Let us pray.