

Title: God's Grand Rescue Plan
Date: April 3, 2022
Subject: God's grand rescue mission spans eternity and will be fulfilled.
Scripture: Luke 24:25 - 27, 44 - 47; Romans 5:6 - 8

We're 12 days out from Good Friday, 14 from Easter. This means we're quickly approaching the time when we celebrate two of the core events of God's great rescue mission – the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Everything in history points forward or back to these momentous events that took place in Jerusalem almost 2000 years ago. This will be our focus from now till Easter.

We begin our Scripture search in the historical narrative authored by Luke. We do so in unique fashion as we start with “after the fact” events. Jesus Christ had risen from the dead earlier in the day and then had conversations with his followers to help them understand what he had come to do.

Read Luke 24:25 - 27, 44 - 47.

I. The essentials of God's plan

Two disciples decided to leave Jerusalem and walk to the village of Emmaus. Jesus joined them, but they were kept from recognizing him. They were discouraged and disappointed. Jesus asked what they had been discussing. The disciples were flabbergasted because everybody had been talking about the crucifixion. They were surprised he wasn't aware. They explained to Jesus that he had been sentenced by the chief priests to death and was crucified. They added: “We had hoped he was the one who was going to redeem Israel and what's more, it's the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb earlier this morning but didn't find his body...Some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but didn't see him” (Luke 24:20 - 24).

The second incident comes after the two men hurried back to Jerusalem and reported to the other disciples they'd seen Jesus. The Savior suddenly appeared in the room. The group was startled and thought they'd seen a ghost.

Jesus seized the opportunities to show how every part of the Old Testament had written about him. He may have started with the first promise of a Savior: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will crush your head and you will strike his heel” (Genesis 3:15). The prophet Isaiah: “Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:4, 5); and the anguished prayer from the Psalms: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Psalm 22).

Scripture foretold he, the Christ, would suffer, be beaten, tortured and killed. He would also rise from the dead on the third day. The result would be people could hear he provided forgiveness of sins and eternal life to all who repent and turn from their wicked acts against God.

If this were the only parts of God's word we looked at, we might get the impression Jesus waited to spring a surprise on his followers, kind of like an April Fool's joke, "Hey. Guess what? I'm alive!"

However, Jesus hadn't kept his followers in the dark. He had repeatedly told them what he'd come to do. This teaching began after Peter stated he believed Jesus was the Christ, the promised deliverer. Jesus told them he must suffer, be rejected, be killed and after three days rise again (Mark 8:31, 32). Apparently, Peter missed the part about Jesus rising from the dead and focused on suffering and death. He pulled Jesus aside to privately rebuke him, "Jesus. Seems like you have a death fixation. Not gonna happen. You shouldn't say stuff like that. It's scaring the others who aren't as brave as me and it's simply not right for you to talk this way."

The next time was after Peter, James and John saw the heavenly splendor of Jesus. Jesus gave orders to not tell anyone what they'd seen until he'd risen from the dead (Mark 9:9, 10). It wasn't all that difficult for the disciples to keep on the down low as they didn't understand what they'd seen and he meant by "rising from the dead." It seems they periodically discussed the matter, trying to figure out what Jesus was talking about.

Later Jesus plainly spoke again: "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise" (Mark 9:31). The disciples still didn't get it and were afraid to ask.

Then, just a few months before Jesus was crucified, he again predicted his death. He told them about his betrayal, being condemned to death, mocked, flogged and killed... and three days later... he would rise (Mark 10:32 - 34). He said everything that was written by the prophets about him will be fulfilled (Luke 18:31). But the disciples still didn't grasp what he said.

II. The timing of God's plan

Read Romans 5:6 - 8.

Jesus died at exactly the right time. It was when we were still powerless, when we were still sinners. Humans had not arrived at the place where they were able to deliver themselves from the punishment for their moral crimes against God. They hadn't improved to the point where they could present themselves to God and say, "We are good, you need to accept us." We hadn't grown to place of being worthy to receive God's magnanimous expression of love. We were still mired in our sin which separated us from God.

If Jesus had to wait until we improved to the place where we deserved heaven and forgiveness of sins, he'd still be waiting. He'd be waiting for all of eternity because it will never, ever happen. Instead, "Christ Jesus gave himself as a ransom for all people - the testimony given in its proper time" (1 Timothy 2:6).

Jesus could only die at the right time because he had entered humanity at the right time. "When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman...that we might receive the full rights of sons" (Galatians 4:4, 5). God intervened in time to orchestrate his mission of rescuing people from their sins and the punishment they required. "God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, and at his appointed season he brought his word to light" (Titus 1:2, 3).

God promised before the beginning of time. That thought boggles our minds. It's difficult to capture what it means for God to always have existed and is beyond time. We're locked into the number of years before

get a driver's license, months till school is out, weeks till birthday, days until Christmas, hours till supper, minutes till class is done, seconds till computer site is accessed. We're all about time. God isn't bound by time.

Somewhere before time began, he had conceived of the necessity to deliver people, whom he had not yet created, from their sins that they had not yet committed and that the way to do that was to send Jesus to earth. How did that work for a God who has unlimited knowledge and all of eternity past to figure out all the possible scenarios and ramifications of each way he could save people? The plan he came up with, the only one that would work and be sufficient - he would send the Son of God to earth to die on a cross. That's why Scripture tells us Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, the perfect sacrifice, "was slain from the creation of the world" (Revelation 13:8).

Before God had created the universe, before he created the first people, before there was any need of rescuing anybody, the act of Christ coming and dying was settled in eternity. It was as good as done. In addition, God knew who'd respond to his offer of deliverance and their names were written in the Book of Life from the creation of the world (Revelation 17:8).

These are the ones who've been ransomed and freed from captivity to the devil and sin "with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God" (1 Peter 1:18 - 21).

God didn't need to change his plan once time began and he'd created people. He didn't need to seek another alternative because what he had in mind wasn't going to work. He wasn't caught off guard by humanity's behavior and therefore needed to adapt. He didn't need to say, "Wait a minute, Son. There are more sinners than I expected. You need to die again. Wait. Even more people and more sins. Sorry, but you need to die more times. Maybe what you're doing isn't going to be as effective as we thought, so maybe you need to die every day, just to make sure we have enough coverage. Maybe we should try something else in addition to what you've done or do something completely different." Jesus doesn't need to die, rise, repeat.

It was totally unnecessary for God to alter his plans when the tenth person sinned or the thousandth, the millionth, the ten billionth. The sacrificial, substitutionary death of Jesus on the cross is completely sufficient and adequate to pay the punishment for all the sins of all people. It becomes effective for the individual when he or she places their trust in Jesus. Every person is created by God, but not all become a child of God.

"But now Christ has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed to take away the sins of many people; And he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him... But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy" (Hebrews 9:26 - 28; 10:12 - 14).

At a yet future time is the complete fulfillment of what God has in store for those who have placed their trust in his Son Jesus Christ. It will begin with “the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ which God will bring about in his own time - God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and the Lord of Lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen” (1 Timothy 6:14 - 16).

At just the right time Christ was born, died and will come again to usher us into the presence of God in heaven.

III. Opposition to God's plan

At the forefront of the titanic struggle against God's mission is the devil. He wants the opposite of what God wants. God has MORE for us to experience as for his children. God wants MORE people, as many as possible, to be with him forever. Therefore, the devil wants LESS for us and few people, as few as possible, to be with God. Though the devil says he loves us and has a terrific plan, one filled with fun, excitement and no need for a boring God, he's lying through his teeth. He has a horrible plan for our lives.

We aren't informed of when Satan was created by God. Somewhere in time he staged a rebellion against the Almighty God (Isaiah 14:12 - 15; Ezekiel 28). He wanted to be like God - have the same power, authority and control. He took angels with him in his revolt. He soon sought to get people on his side in his attempt to short circuit God's mission of salvation.

He attacked the first people created by God. Adam and Eve lived in a perfect environment where all their needs were met. Satan's choice of a weapon was a question: “Did God really say, “You must not eat from any tree in the garden?”” (Genesis 3:1). One source describes his attack: “He insinuated a falsehood and portrayed rebellion as clever, but essentially innocent, self-interest” (NIV Study Bible note on Genesis 3:1).

The devil misstated God's command implying God prohibited eating fruit from any tree. He cast doubt on God's ability to act in Eve's best interest. He sought to put Eve in the position of leader thus violating God's creative order. The devil gets his name deceiver honestly because he deceives.

Some of his other attempts to thwart God's mission included getting all but eight people to get on the ark built by Noah, convincing Abraham to have a son outside of his marriage relationship with Sarah. This would throw a monkey wrench in the family line to bring about the chosen nation of Israel through which the Lord would fulfill his promises. The devil had a field day with the people of Israel as they wandered around the wilderness as they complained about wanting to go back to Egypt, not having water or food, desiring new leaders and worshipping a golden calf instead of the Lord. He sought to distance Job from the Lord by getting Job's wife to challenge Job's trust in and relationship with God: “Curse God and die.”

The devil concentrated his attacks on Jesus. Satan's activity began shortly after Jesus was born when he used wicked King Herod and his soldiers to make an attempt on the life of the young child. The temptation of Jesus focused on the devil's claims to be able to grant Jesus power and the kingdoms of the world without having to die. This came after hammering Jesus for 40 days and 40 nights. He tried anything and everything,

every twisted trick in the book of evil to make Jesus disobey God the Father, to sin, to be unfaithful, to misuse his power, to compromise with the devil. If Satan could get Jesus to commit a sin, any sin - envy of those who weren't out in the desert, seek his personal kingdom and not God the Father's - God's entire plan would unravel like a cheap sweater. Satan couldn't get Jesus to blink an eye. The devil would later use the disciple Peter to rebuke Jesus and present the same kind of temptation of avoiding the cross. It didn't work then either.

Move to the end of Christ's earthly life. He's in the garden of Gethsemane praying. Jesus asks the Father if there is any other way because everything is possible with the Father (Mark 14:36). This could have been the last ditch effort by Satan to prevent Jesus from going to the cross by suggesting there might be other plans by which he might not have to suffer the full wrath of God. And then, after Jesus prayed "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done," Jesus again rebuked Peter, this time for cutting off the ear of the servant of the high priest and reminded all present that he had the ability to call to the Father who would send 72,000 angels if he so wanted (Matthew 26:53 - 56).

The devil will ultimately have some last gasp attempts. In the end times Satan will wage great battles against God in a desperate attempt to prevent God's plan from becoming fulfilled and his own doom be sealed. The battles will make the fight scenes in the Lord of the Rings movies or any other movie look like child's play. There are beasts and demons and people controlled by the devil trying to dethrone God. His forces of evil will be unsuccessful. The devil and his armies will be thrown into eternal punishment where they will be tormented day and night forever and ever (Revelation 20:10). God will be victorious.

There's one aspect of Satan's strategy we haven't mentioned yet. It's his fight against people who are alive today. Satan wants to do is to keep people in the dark about God's plan. He tells people, "It's okay to be religious. You should be religious. But you don't need to place your trust in Jesus to save you from your sins. Just work on being good little people. God will take everybody to heaven. There are so many ways to get there. Follow any belief system that appeals to you. You don't really need God."

Another scheme is to indoctrinate people in the ways of the world system so they'll be anti the things of God. He appeals to people's evil tendencies, interests and feelings. We see the rise of self-interest, self-fulfillment, end to marriage and family, anti-biblical concept of genders, move toward one world government.

A third tactic is to sidetrack the people of God, get them to focus on other things rather than the things of God. Some of the devil's devices are given on the back of the sermon notes and expressed in words beginning with the letter D. A homework assignment....

God's grand rescue plan employed the Son of God coming to earth, living a perfect life, dying on the cross to pay the penalty for people and rising from the dead. The mission was and is to enable people to be brought into a right relationship with God, have forgiveness, and experience eternal life.

"Our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; The day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime" (Romans 13:11, 12).