

THIS GOOD FRIDAY REMEMBER GOD IS IN CONTROL

Written by admin
Thursday, 05 April 2012 12:37 -

By Dr. Henderson Ward



As Good Friday approaches we once again turn our thoughts to how evil, more precisely how the Devil, seemed to be triumphant against the very Son of God. The Devil is indeed a formidable foe and we know all the things that make him as powerful as he is. We would do well to remind ourselves that this supernatural being is not all powerful and has limits imposed on him by Almighty God. Human beings, although less powerful than the Devil, nevertheless have powerful freewill which cannot be overridden.

Too many people, when dealing with things of the demonic world, are filled with trepidation as they proceed and are most fearful of the outcome; which may turn out rather differently from their expectation. Ghosts, the occult, demons, underworld creatures, the paranormal, the supernatural all create in our minds a nebulous world beyond our knowledge and control and we fear they may break forth and destroy us with impunity. We should remind ourselves that Almighty God who has created this world and by whom the entire universe is sustained has not ceded control to anybody but is still very much in charge. Almighty God permits many things to happen, some of which we humans do not fully understand and in truth do not appreciate. Some things do not make sense to us but will redound to the ultimate benefit of all mankind. The Bible is mindful of this and reminds us of God's superior reasoning, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:8-9) God is able because of his superior knowledge and wisdom to make all things, no matter how ungodly they appear, serve his irreducible purpose and ultimately God's will shall prevail as attested to by Isaiah, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." (Isaiah 46: 10b) This puts the Devil in a frightful dilemma because everything he does, and he does a lot of wickedness to further his agenda, God uses with majestic skill and lethal timing to undermine evil and reinforce his benevolence to mankind even although sometimes that is not always readily apparent.

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Let us take a couple of examples to reinforce this point for it is important to our understanding of evil and how God deals with it. Here is example number one. The Patriarch Jacob, later renamed Israel, had twelve sons and God had promised him that all twelve of his sons were to be blessed and through them the nation of Israel would be established and become a blessing to the entire world. Jacob loved Joseph above all the others because he, along with Benjamin, was the children born to Jacob's favorite wife Rachel. Now Joseph was especially gifted and could dream dreams and interpret them and as a result he was even more highly esteemed by Jacob and put on a pedestal above his brothers who were envious of his position and developed great contempt for him. Egged on by the Devil, who through his demons are always at hand to prompt and suggest evil remedies, the brothers planned to kill Joseph at the first opportunity that came to hand and such an opportunity did present itself when the brothers were tending their stock a long way from home and Joseph was sent to look them up and take them provision. The brothers took the opportunity to get rid of Joseph and wanted to slay him then and there but agreed instead to toss him in a well which they did. Later some Ishmaelite herdsmen, returning to their homeland, passed near the brothers and the brothers decided to sell Joseph to them so that they would not only get rid of Joseph for good but in the process make some money as well. All this was done, Joseph's coat of many colors that he was wearing was soaked in blood and the brothers reported to their father that Joseph was slain by some wild beast. The Devil accomplished his mission, Jacob is mortally afflicted, Joseph is no more, Israel is in crisis and God's plan for Israel and the world is in jeopardy. To make things very much worse a most severe drought takes hold of the land and everything is devastated, grass and animal all perish, crops disappear and the very survival of Jacob and his kindred are in serious doubt. There is only one thing to do, abandon everything and travel to Egypt and find food or else all is lost. In the meantime the great drought was devastating the whole region and a certain man who was sold to Potiphar, was wrongfully accused and put in prison. Eventually he was brought to the king and interpreted the king's dream, was promoted to governor, put in charge of storing provisions the seven years preceding the drought and was now in charge of the efforts to distribute and sell grain to peoples in the region. By a process of benevolent scheming Jacob's children who were sent to buy grain in Egypt eventually came face to face with this 'governor' who literally had their survival, and the survival of the fledgling nation of Israel, in his hands. This 'governor' dealt with them most kindly, had them bring the remaining family to live in Egypt and Jacob and his kindred survived the terrible seven year drought and lived peacefully and well in Goshen. And who was this 'governor' who ensured their survival; well it was none other than their brother Joseph. It was all summed up most succinctly by Joseph himself, "And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your life by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God" (Genesis 45:7-8a) As so often is the case God turned the Devil's wicked scheme into an instrument to achieve his glorious purpose.

Here is example number two. Christianity was founded by Jesus Christ himself but when he died, was resurrected and returned to heaven he left just one hundred and twenty disciples upon earth to carry on Christianity. Christianity was so radical and different that everybody was against it including the religious authority of the day, the civil and local government and the ruling Roman Empire. Their opposition was so extreme that many Christians were severely

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beaten, many were imprisoned and several were executed including the first Christian martyr, a man called Stephen. Prior to all these persecutions the Christians were loathed to leave Jerusalem and its environs but the persecutions had an ironic effect. When one hundred and twenty disciples were under the cosh and repressed at every turn, beaten senseless, incarcerated at the whim of the authorities, killed at random to appease the religious bigots then Christianity should, by any measure, be wiped out. Saul of Tarsus, himself a persecutor of the Christians, as he was going to Damascus to apprehend more Christians met Jesus along the way and was converted. Saul of Tarsus, whose name was changed to Paul, was not exempt from suffering and persecution as he himself made clear, "in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned" (2 Corinthians 11: 23b-25b) This Saul of Tarsus was the Devil's main tool to destroy Christianity, for he had the right connections and was given the utmost authority, but God intervened and Paul became the greatest evangelist/missionary that the world has known. It was Paul who took Christianity from what was settling down quietly and smugly as a Jewish religion of extremely limited appeal and carried it beyond Jerusalem to Syria, Turkey and Asia Minor and then to mainland Europe (Greece) and then finally to the heart of the Roman Empire to mighty Rome (Italy) itself. The very man the Devil chose, instigated and directed to destroy Christianity, God used mightily not just to consolidate Christianity (which he did so effectively by writing thirteen gospels) but to spread it to all parts of the globe and today Christianity has root and is known in every country on earth. This is another example of God demonstrating his superiority over the Devil in using evil intentions to accomplish divine objectives. The hurts and pain and the horrible suffering of Jesus associated with Good Friday gives way inevitably to the unsurpassed joy and blessedness of Easter. That is how it was and again will be in the scheme of divine ordinances for the depressing gloom and chill of midnight will surely give way to the powerful brightness and warmth of sunshine just as every believer, enduring the travails and torments of this hapless earthly journey will be transported to a totally different life of majestic and unimaginable splendor in the world to come.

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