

IT'S ABOUT TIME

I've begun reading a new book. It's called Principles for Dealing with the Changing World Order. Now, the premise of the book is that over time the world changes. From time to time the Geopolitical map changes and things are different than they used to be. Once upon a time, the Dutch were the foremost country in the world both technologically and economically, then the British were the foremost country. During the balance of our lifetimes the US has been the foremost power. One thing is certain, and that is change.

I've read several books that make the same point, though this book is different because the author is trying to make a slightly different point. The author is trying to tell the reader not only how to recognize those factors that portend the change, but also how to prepare for those changes and weather them. Don't ask me what those are, because I'm still reading. I bring up this point because I've noticed something about books of this sort.

Some books in this genre take the position that history is an evolutionary process. The message goes something like this, "History has its ups and downs, but overall, history is on an upward trend. It's a story of progress." Other books take the position that history is cyclical. Things happen in cycles. There is nothing new under the sun. History is a cycle of birth, growth, decline and renewal. The book I'm reading now is in this latter category.

Now, I bring this up, because if you read the bible, you notice that the same dynamic plays out. From time-to-time things change. Noah was sitting around one day, when God called him to build an ark. He survived the great flood and the world began again. Abraham was a merchant in Ur, when God called him to leave everything behind and move into the wilderness with nothing but the promise that God would make him into a great nation. The people of Israel were laboring as slaves in the land of Egypt, when God sent a liberator. They left and went out into the promised land.

All of these events can be made to fit into whatever theory you have of history. You can see these movements I just listed as a story of progress- a story of movement with upgrade at each step. Alternatively, you can see it as a story of cycles.

We've just celebrated another changing event. The most significant event in history, at least from my point of view. We've just celebrated the resurrection of our Lord Jesus. Now, looking back on it from our vantage point, it's easy. But if you had been present at any of these events, you might have wondered if they were really a big deal. Just look at all the complaints Moses had to endure as the nation of Israel trudged through the desert.

The same is true with the resurrection of Jesus. The initial stories recorded in the gospels- for the most part- show the wonder and joy of Jesus followers as they meet the resurrected Jesus. However, when we get to the opening chapter of Acts, things have died down. The book Acts begins with the resurrected Jesus telling his followers to wait. Just wait for it!

Immediately preceding the story for today we get the account of the day of Pentecost, You should be familiar with that story. If you aren't, I 'm not going to repeat it here. You can either read it for yourself- it's in the first 21 verses of the 2nd chapter of Acts- or you can come back on the day of Pentecost and listen to my sermon. What I will say is that the bible makes it clear that at least some of the onlookers don't understand what they are seeing happen. So, Peter gets up to explain what is happening to the crowd.

The verse for today, picks up a portion of that explanation. Here he tells them that Jesus the Nazarene is a man attested to by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through him in their midst, was delivered up by a predetermined plan and the foreknowledge of God, and nailed to the cross by the hands of the godless. God raised him up again.

He goes on to say that David spoke of him, quoting Psalm 16. The author links what David says with the events that just happened. He says while David died and was buried just like the rest of us, Jesus died but was raised. He was neither abandoned to Hades nor did his flesh suffer decay.

Now, as with any event in history there are a couple of ways that we can look at this event. How are we to take this event? Was the history of our Lord always building up to this point? Some people have taken this story that way. God always planned for the death and resurrection of Jesus. In fact, this passage seems to suggest just that by talking about the foreknowledge and predetermined plan of God. Or is this just another part of the cycle, God's latest attempt to deal with a sinful world that just will not bow to his will?

I don't know the answer to that. Honestly, I could argue for both. What I can tell you is that there must have been people within the crowd who were thanking God for the event. They had been waiting patiently for God to Act. They had been waiting for a Messiah. When Jesus came, they saw the hand of God in the miracles and wonders he performed, the words he said, and he lives he touched. Those that had been thinking, it's about time for God to come, must have been happy to witness it.

But you see there's a subtle trap in thinking like that. It makes me think about myself and how I perceive the world around me. How many times have I sat and patiently waited for God to Act? How many times have I waited for the risen Lord to come and fix things. How many times have I said, "Ask are you coming soon, Lord? It's about time, isn't it?"

One of the big mysteries I have about the Jesus story is why Jesus came during this particular period of time. It couldn't have been because times were particularly bad. Palestine was enjoying a period of relative peace and prosperity during this time. They were occupied by the Romans, but the Romans were- by the standards of the day- relatively benign rulers. There were periods of insurrection shortly before and shortly after Jesus' incarnation, but not during his incarnation.

If Jesus were going to come during bad times why not in the 1300's when Europe was ravaged by the Black Plague? Why not during the Mongol invasions of the 12th century? Why not during the Spanish Inquisition? Why not during the holocaust?

We can speculate about that all day long, but it mirrors the way we think about our own lives. When things get bad in our own lives we think, "How much longer am I going to have to go through this? Why doesn't God do something? Isn't it about time?"

This is one among many questions that I can't answer. Brothers and sisters, I don't know why things happen the way they do? I don't know why things happen when they happen. What I do know is that they happened. The bible doesn't give us all the details because the author wants us to focus on the most important thing.

God may not be doing what I think should God should be doing when I think God should be doing it. I may not even be perceiving what God is doing. That doesn't mean that God is doing nothing. God is out there working for good in all things. God is working on a predetermined plan, a plan that includes the offer of salvation to all the people. That's all I need to know.

I understand that life is hard. I also understand the temptation to say to God, "Isn't it about time you did something?" My response to that is that is for God to decide. What I can say is that it's about time I did something. Instead of focusing on what God should be doing, I should be focused on what God has done. God has already done so much. The death and resurrection of Jesus are yet another sign that God is at work in the world around us.

Have you noticed all that God has done and is doing? If you haven't, isn't it about time you did?