

THE TIME OF JESUS' DEATH

Considering the Sovereign Time of God in Life and Death

It has been said that timing is everything. To be sure, timing is important, but it is a little hyperbolic to say that timing is *everything*. Nevertheless, "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die" (Eccl. 3:1-2). In a universe governed by a sovereign Lord every person lives when, where and how God decides in His infinite wisdom. Paul notes, "[God] made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place" (Acts 17:26). David said to God, "your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be" (Ps. 139:16, NIV).

There is "a time to be born, and a time to die." This is true for each one of us, as it was true for God's one and only Son. Paul writes, "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (Gal. 4:4-5).

Also, Jesus knew His ministry of announcing the arrival of the kingdom would take place at just the right time. As you read the following verses from Mark's Gospel note the phrase: "the time is fulfilled." Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mk. 1:14-15). Throughout His life Jesus carried out His ministry with a conscious awareness of God's immutable timing (Jn. 2:4).

As you read through the gospels, it is amazing how many times the Jews tried to kill Jesus as He mysteriously escapes. Nobody in the history of mankind has had as many near-death experiences as Jesus did. One time, Jesus went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day and really laid into the congregation. He condemned them by showing that foreigners during the time of Elijah and Elisha were more accepting of the prophets than their own people were (Lk. 4:25-27). "When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill, so that they could throw him down the cliff. But passing through their midst, he went away" (vv. 28-30). Jesus narrowly escapes this lynching. Miraculously, and apparently without a word, He simply walked away, because His time had not yet come.

Another close call, without much detail, is found in John chapter 8. The Jews are outraged when Jesus identifies Himself with Yahweh by claiming "before Abraham was, I am" (vs. 58). This statement is blasphemous to the Jews and puts them over the edge. "So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple" (vs. 59). Once again, supernatural intervention is assumed on the grounds that His time had not yet arrived.

Jesus repeatedly evades arrest and/or death until the divinely appointed hour of the Father arrives. John is explicit in making this point: "So they were seeking to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come" (Jn. 7:30; cf. 7:44, 8:20).

In Matthew 26:2 Jesus tells His disciples plainly that He will be crucified during the Passover: "You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified." This comment by Jesus is especially fascinating as you consider what follows in the narrative: "Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and plotted together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. But they said, 'Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people'" (vv. 3-5). The great irony here which displays the sovereignty of God, is that time after time the Jews tried to kill Jesus, but couldn't. Now when they want to delay killing Him until the feast is over, they will find themselves killing Him. Why? Because the Father had ordained that Jesus would die during the feast as the final Passover Lamb for the sin of the world (Jn. 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7).

What was true for Christ is true for us: We are at this place and this point in history, due to the decree of God before the creation of the world. Furthermore, we will remain here until God's appointed time transpires. And that time too is already decreed. Depending upon our perspective, this can fill us with a fatalistic despair or unshakable hope. For those with faith the latter results. If God is in complete control of our destiny than

nothing can alter it. All the powers of hell combined couldn't thwart God's purpose for our lives. Therefore, we are immortal until God's work for us is done. Let's live like it.

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