

God's Plan for Society: Conceived in Liberty

Isaiah 61:1-3

Hymns 211, 422

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God's Plan for Society

Part 1: Conceived in Liberty

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INTRODUCTION

To say that we live in perplexing times would be a gross understatement. The spirit of coercion and oppression has taken deep root in America. Whether it's the vaccine, masks, transgender activism, you name it, there are people ready and willing to use force to propound their ideas. Voices from the past saw this day coming, or at least saw its potential. I will begin this morning with a "who said it?" quiz. Here's the quote - "You and I are told increasingly we have to choose between left or right. Well I'd like to suggest there is no such thing as left or right. There is only up or down - up to man's age-old dream – the ultimate in individual freedom consistent with law and order, or down to the ant heap of totalitarianism. And regardless of their sincerity, or their humanitarian motives, those who would trade our freedom for security have embarked on this downward course." Ok – who said it? Was it (a) Donald Trump, (b) Abraham Lincoln, (c) Ronald Reagan, or (d) Barack Obama? Some of you, I am sure guessed Lincoln because I borrowed a phrase from his Gettysburg Address in my title this morning. I should know that speech well actually – I had to write it out a couple times in fourth grade for some minor misbehavior. In fact, it came to the place where I kept a handwritten copy ready in my social studies book for the next infraction. You should have seen the look on Mrs. Bush's face when I whipped that out and handed it to her! Priceless. . . But, the correct answer is not Lincoln, it is Reagan. He said those words when I was a six month old infant, but they are even more applicable today

than they were 57 years ago. The conflict between liberty and tyranny is, indeed, age-old. The great majority of people, including Reagan himself, are unaware of its origin, and true nature. Most people think it is purely political. But they are wrong! This controversy is spiritual. Yes, it has political implications, but the controversy itself is inherently spiritual. In this short series of messages, it is my purpose to explore this question – what would society look like if God were in direct control of it? Today's message will examine what we Adventists call the Great Controversy and see that the principles of this conflict permeate human society. Part two will contrast two nations from Scripture, ancient Egypt, and ancient Israel. In the story of the Exodus we discover an example of a situation in which God engaged directly in the development of a nation. Then, finally, in part three, we will examine the end-time implications of God's plan for society. We will discover that liberty and oppression will come into a final, direct conflict in the last days of earth's history, and that God will intervene to deliver His people from satanic-inspired tyranny and take them to heaven where they will enjoy the perfect society, conceived in liberty.

I want to begin where our Lord Jesus Christ, Himself began when He was invited to have the sermon at His home church in Nazareth. This is our Scripture reading this morning, from Isaiah 61:1-3 -

Is. 61:1 "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, Because the LORD has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to *those who are* bound;

Is. 61:2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn,

Is. 61:3 To console those who mourn in Zion, To give them beauty for ashes, The oil of joy for mourning, The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; That they may be called trees of righteousness, The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified."

(Isaiah 61:1-3 NKJV)

What a beautiful passage!! Jesus began in Nazareth with these verses that speak of His own anointing as the Messiah (which means the Anointed One). Here's the question that His hearers should have asked, and that we must not fail to ask – what was He anointed to do? I believe we have the answer in this very passage. Let's start

with the One who anoints Him. Who is that? It is the Spirit of the Lord God! The apostle Paul, in the NT reminds us that “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” 2 Cor 3:17. Now note how this statement by Paul is exactly in harmony with what the Messiah was to do. He was given a message to proclaim. What is the nature of the message? It is a message of liberation, of deliverance! Who is the Messiah, friends? Who is Jesus? He is a LIBERATOR! The second coming of Christ, to which we look forward, is the culmination of the battle that He won at the cross. Even the reference to the vengeance of God is directly related to this conflict between liberty and tyranny. The instigators and supporters of tyranny will then be the subjects of God’s wrath, because of their crimes against God and their fellow men.

So here’s the point of the Scripture reading: Christ’s own preaching of the gospel was couched in terms of a restoration of liberty from the bondage of sin. What does that tell us about the nature of the Great Controversy, and what does it tell us about its implications for society?

THE GREAT CONTROVERSY AS A REVOLUTION

To consider this, we must turn to Isaiah 14. We are familiar with a part of this chapter, but there is more here than typically meets our eye.

“How you are fallen from heaven,

O Lucifer, son of the morning!

How you are cut down to the ground,

You who weakened the nations!

Is. 14:13 For you have said in your heart:

“I will ascend into heaven,

I will exalt my throne above the stars of God;

I will also sit on the mount of the congregation

On the farthest sides of the north;

Is. 14:14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds,

I will be like the Most High.’

We are familiar with this part, but we often fail to read what comes before it.

Is. 14:3 ¶ It shall come to pass in the day the LORD gives you rest from your sorrow, and from your fear and the hard bondage in which you were made to serve,

Is. 14:4 that you will take up this proverb against the king of Babylon, and say:

“How the oppressor has ceased,
The golden city ceased!

Is. 14:5 The LORD has broken the staff of the wicked,
The scepter of the rulers;

Is. 14:6 He who struck the people in wrath with a continual stroke,
He who ruled the nations in anger,
Is persecuted *and* no one hinders.

Is. 14:7 The whole earth is at rest *and* quiet;
They break forth into singing.

This is speaking of the king of Babylon, but the passage flows from all this right into the lament for Lucifer, the fallen angel. Friends, he is the real king of Babylon. And he is the one who is behind the oppressive regimes of our own generation.

So what would heaven have been like had Lucifer been able to gain power? He would have done exactly what all dictators do when they come to power - eliminate or marginalize your opposition. Had Satan had the power, he would have killed God and all those who were loyal to God. This is why Jesus referred to him in John 8:44 in this way: “He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *resources*, for he is a liar and the father of it.”

He would have surrounded himself with an elite class of angels who would be his enforcers.

He also would have deprived the inhabitants of heaven of their freedom and made them his slaves.

Of course, Satan did not have the power to do all that he wanted to do. Even though he was successful in alienating a third of the angels from God, he did not have the power to overthrow the divine government. God exiled him to protect the loyal angels and the unfallen worlds, but He did not destroy the revolutionaries yet. The universe must have time to see the development of the principles of the revolution, and to understand its true nature.

THE FALL AS A REVOLUTION

Now we should notice that the devil promised the very same thing to Eve in Genesis 3:5 that he desired to have himself:

Gen. 3:1 Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?"

Gen. 3:2 ¶ And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden;

Gen. 3:3 but of the fruit of the tree which *is* in the midst of the garden, God has said, "You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.' "

Gen. 3:4 ¶ Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die.

Gen. 3:5 For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

(Genesis 3:1-4 NKJV)

I want you to consider for a moment the implications of this statement. "You will be like God, knowing good and evil." Here we see the promise that mankind would, through a rejection of God's law, develop an intrinsic morality. In other words, people would choose to determine for themselves what is right and wrong, rather than being accountable to God and to His law (which is extrinsic). Here is the problem with that, though. You will be like God implies this - not only do people desire to develop their own set of rules, but they also have this innate desire to impose their rules on others. And, because those who reject God have their own god-complex, they probably see

themselves as being above all rule. Does that make sense? To go further, you would be inclined to excuse others who break your rules as long as they were useful to you in your quest to be like God. But you would come down with force and coercion on all who break your rules if they disagreed with, or were not useful to you.

CAIN AND ABEL – THE SPIRIT OF THE REVOLUTION

We see this very spirit immediately manifested after the Fall in the interaction between Cain and Abel. Take a look at Genesis 4:1-8 with me, please.

Gen. 4:1 Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, "I have acquired a man from the LORD."

Gen. 4:2 Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.

Gen. 4:3 And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD.

Gen. 4:4 Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering,

Gen. 4:5 but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.

Gen. 4:6 ¶ So the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?"

Gen. 4:7 If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it."

Gen. 4:8 ¶ Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.

Their argument over worship went beyond what to bring for a sacrifice. Abel pointed out that not only was his brother wrong in what he brought as an offering, and that he did not have the right to make his own rules, but that he was also wrong to coerce his younger brother into acknowledging this supposed right. Cain, because he had

rejected God's Word and His law, felt that he had every right to make the rules, and when Abel rejected that idea and refused to legitimize and submit to Cain, Cain did what every tyrant since then has done, he killed him.

Listen to this inspired commentary on these events:

"When Cain, moved by the spirit of the wicked one, saw that he could not control Abel, he was so enraged that he destroyed his life. And whenever there are any who will stand in vindication of the righteousness of the law of God, the same spirit will be manifested against them. It is the spirit that through all the ages has set up the stake and kindled the burning pile for the disciples of Christ. But the cruelties heaped upon the follower of Jesus are instigated by Satan and his hosts because they cannot force him to submit to their control." PP 77

Brothers and sisters, here we see exactly what would have taken place in heaven, if Satan had been allowed the opportunity. It is only the restraining power of the Spirit of God that prevents these things from happening everywhere in this world today. Make no mistake, Satan's plan for society is one of oppression, coercion, lies, theft, and brutality. Satan claimed that God was an oppressor and that he and his angelic sympathizers were victims. Christ, our blessed Savior stood up to this malevolent foe and risked His own existence to forever put to rest his false claims and to make an atonement for the sins we have committed in the course of this fearful revolution.

Yes, freedom of choice is so important to God that He was willing to risk His own existence to protect it. Now I know what some might say in response to this. They might argue like this: "No, God really is a tyrant because He only allows choices with which He is in agreement." "Look at the case of Lucifer", they say. "God is going to destroy him because he chose things that God didn't like." But this is a fallacious argument - let me show you why it is. God dealt with sin, and with its author, because He knew that if Satan and his ideas were to prevail that freedom of choice would be completely eliminated for everyone. So it is not that God was only allowing certain choices that He approved, rather He would not allow a permanent, tyrannical society to come into being. He has allowed the universe to see what the result of Satan's plan would be, but He will not allow that kind of oppressive rule to continue. He will

eliminate its originator, and He will eliminate all those who desire to participate in it. Listen to what SDA pioneer Ellen White said about this:

By the facts unfolded in the progress of the great controversy, God will demonstrate the principles of His rules of government, which have been falsified by Satan and by all whom he has deceived. His justice will finally be acknowledged by the whole world, though the acknowledgment will be made too late to save the rebellious. God carries with Him the sympathy and approval of the whole universe as step by step His great plan advances to its complete fulfillment. He will carry it with Him in the final eradication of rebellion. It will be seen that all who have forsaken the divine precepts have placed themselves on the side of Satan, in warfare against Christ. When the prince of this world shall be judged, and all who have united with him shall share his fate, the whole universe as witnesses to the sentence will declare, "Just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints." Revelation 15:3. . PP 79.1

APPEAL

In closing, let me ask this question: In what society do you wish to live? Are you a lover of freedom and liberty, or are do you want to control everyone around you and make them conform to your standard? That which brings liberty and true happiness is not everyone doing whatever is right in his own eyes, but rather a submission to what God says, to His law. Is it your desire to live in harmony with "the law of liberty" as James called it? Or are you seeking to justify your own plans and ideas? Friend, choose for yourself this day whom you will serve - the devil, who is the vilest of tyrants, or Jesus Christ, the Liberator of the human race. May God help us that we would be preparing for that heavenly society, which is all about freedom and liberty!