

The Divine “Must” of a Crucified Christ

Introduction

The Text

¹⁸ Now it happened that as he was praying alone, the disciples were with him. And he asked them, “Who do the crowds say that I am?” ¹⁹ And they answered, “John the Baptist. But others say, Elijah, and others, that one of the prophets of old has risen.” ²⁰ Then he said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” And Peter answered, “The Christ of God.”

²¹ And he strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one, ²² saying, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.” (Luke 9:18–22)

Praying Alone

- A. The scene begins with Jesus “praying alone” (v. 18). It’s a detail that must not be read over. For Luke is everywhere in His gospel jealous to show us the connection between Jesus’ prayer life and His ministry.
- B. Jesus is praying alone and it is in this place with His Father that He is resolved afresh in His mission towards the cross.
 - 1. We cannot think that, because Jesus was the Son of God, the will of His Father for Him in this was easy to embrace. It was not. It was agony every time He considered it. And as the day of His passion gets closer, the agony gets increasingly acute.
- C. But, as we’ve said before, Jesus retreats to the desolate place in prayer and it is there that the divine imperative is kept before Him. The call of God on His life is made plain again and He is given fresh strength to keep carrying on.
- D. Brothers and sisters, before we really even get into the main subject we shall be dealing with this morning, if I could just make a point here: It is on our knees in prayer that God both clarifies His will for us and gives us the strength required to execute on that will, however trying it may be for us.
 - 1. If we are not on our knees we will be shaky on our feet. We shall not know the way to go. Or we shall veer away from it when times get tough.

Speaking Openly

- A. So it is in praying alone here that Jesus is steeled in His resolve to head towards the cross. And it is also in this place of prayer with His Father that He discerns the time has come to start speaking of these things openly with His disciples.

1. To this point in Luke's gospel, He has not spoken overtly about His coming death. He knows they're not going to like it. He knows they're not going to understand it. But He knows it's due time to start talking to them about it.
 - a. So the prayer time gives way to discussion. "Who do the crowds say that I am?" (v. 18b) . . . "But who do you say that I am?" (v. 20a). And the discussion gives way to confession: "The Christ of God", Peter says (v. 20b).
- B. It is the first time such a confession has been taken on the lips of man, but there is still so much that they do not understand about the Christ—what this means, what He has really come to do.
 1. So Jesus responds first by warning them to keep quiet on the matter for the time being. And then He proceeds to fill things out a bit more for them: "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised" (v. 22). "You thought the Christ would conquer, and indeed He will (more than you know), but first He must be crucified."
 - a. We have in this single verse really an outline, a summary, of the Messiah's whole career. He will suffer, be rejected, be killed, and be raised.

Why "Must"?!

- A. But here is the question that's going to set up the whole trajectory for this message: Why the "must" there in v. 22? "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."
 1. That these things will be is one thing. But why must it be this way? What are we to make of what I would call this divine "must"? The Divine "Must" of a Crucified Christ.
- B. Our text here is really just the tip of the iceberg on the matter. Jesus is going to say things like this all over the place from here on out in Luke's gospel. I'll give you two more examples, but we'll see many others as we continue.
 1. In Luke 13:33, Jesus speaking of His journey towards Jerusalem and the cross, says: "I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem." I must go to Jerusalem and die.
 2. In Luke 17:24-25, speaking to His disciples of His second coming, Jesus says: " ²⁴ [A]s the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his day. ²⁵ But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation."
- C. According to Jesus, these things must be so, but again, we ask the question: Why?! What is it that makes a crucified Christ so necessary?

There Is No Must with Regard to Mercy

- A. Now I know the answer that many of us are probably putting forward in our minds at this moment. “Well, Nick, because God is holy and righteous and we are sinners, God must punish Jesus in our place so He can forgive us.”
1. But such an answer, while in many ways correct, will not do when we really pause and consider it.
- B. What we have to understand is that, strictly speaking, the Son of God does not have to die. There is no must with regard to mercy. God does not have to forgive us.
1. Listen, I know we like to think God owes us blessing, owes us good gifts, owes us forgiveness, but He doesn't. There is no must with regard to mercy.
 - a. God could've left us to perish for our sin and He would've been right in so doing. He could've cut humanity off once its root went bad in Adam. He nowhere needed to love, to move towards, to incarnate, to die, to rise, to forgive and restore sinners. Nowhere is this technically required of Him. It is an overflow of His love not a result of cold necessity.
- C. So, then, in what sense are we to understand this divine “must”? Why, according to Jesus, “must” such things be so?
1. I've got three reasons for us: (1) The Plan from Eternity; (2) The Promise in Scripture; and (3) The Problem of Forgiveness.

(1) The Plan from Eternity

The Covenant of Redemption

- A. These things must be so because God has planned them from all eternity. Here is perhaps the most difficult reason to grasp but it is the most fundamental, it is the starting place for this “must” that Jesus speak of here.
1. I'm referring in this to a plan that began in the mysterious relation of the trinity, even before the first day of creation. It's a plan that stands outside of time in God's mind but is being worked out in time even as we sit here this morning.
- B. It's what I'm calling The Plan from Eternity, but many theologians in years past have referred to it as the Covenant of Redemption. It is God's covenant, not with man, but with Himself—Father, Son, Spirit. It is the solemn agreement between the persons of the trinity that, in view of the coming fall of humanity, they would work to redeem and restore.
1. Yes, you heard me rightly, before men ever fell, God knew, drew up a plan, and committed Himself to seeing it through—the Father planned it, the Son would execute it, and the Spirit would apply it to the elect to the praise of the glory of His grace.

Hints at this Plan

- A. Now the full account of this agreement is not laid out for us in the Bible, but it is hinted at all over place:
1. Jesus alludes to such a thing when, as the time of His death is approaching, He prays: “¹ Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, ²since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. ³And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. ⁴I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. ⁵And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed” (John 17:1–5).
- B. Now if we make our way back from v. 5 up to v. 1, I think we see this plainly.
1. In v. 5, Jesus speaks of His existence with the Father “before the world existed”—the time when they drafted and agreed upon this plan of redemption.
 2. Then, up in vv. 3-4, we are told that the Father “sent” Jesus to carry out this plan and that Jesus “accomplished the work that [the Father] gave [Him] to do.”
 3. Then, up in v. 2, we see the goal of this mission, the purpose of this plan: The Son has come “to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.”
 4. And then, finally, up in v. 1, we are told how the Son would ultimately accomplish this: “[T]he hour has come”—which in John refers to the hour of His death. The Father and Son, from all eternity, had agreed upon a specific timestamp for the moment of His death.
- C. It’s all there. The plan from eternity that the Son is now executing in time and space.
1. This is why Peter, in 1 Pet 1:20, could speak of Jesus as the Lamb “foreknown before the foundation of the world but . . . made manifest in the last times for [your sake].”
 2. This is why John, in Rev 13:8, could write of people’s names being “written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain.” Before the foundation of the world, this book of life belonged to the Lamb who was slain!
 3. This is why Paul, 2 Tim 1:9, could say that “[God] saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began . . .”
 4. This is why we read in Acts 2:23 that Jesus was “delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God.”
 5. And this is why Jesus Himself would say around the table during the Last Supper with His disciples: “The Son of Man goes as it has been determined . . .” (Luke 22:22).

The “Must” of God’s Plan

- A. Here’s what we need to understand: Because God planned it, it must be so.
- B. Now, I make plans all the time but there is no must about these plans. They may or may not come to fruition. Often, in fact, they don’t.

1. Can I just be real? One of the most depressing moments of my day is when 5:30 rolls around. My time for work is over, I circle back on the to-do list I started my day with, and I realize just how much I didn't get done. I start my day with a ridiculous, naïve optimism. I'm going to finish this task, that project, I'm going to email this person, meet with that person, I'm going to map out sermons for the next year probably, sure.
 - a. And then that optimism devolves into a mild depression at the end of the day when I have to face the fact that, yet again, I didn't carry out the plan. I maybe successfully completed one or two things well, but there's a lot left undone.
- C. But you see I'm not God. There is no must to my plans. Just a big maybe with a question mark. This is not so with God. His plan stands. His plan must be so.
1. This is one of the reasons why James tells us how to handle our plans in relation to God's: "¹³ Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit' — ¹⁴ yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. ¹⁵ Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that'" (James 4:13–15).
- D. The most fundamental reality in all the universe is the will of God. If it is His will that I live, then I must live. If it is His will that I die, then I must die. What He wills, what He plans, must be.
1. Therefore, if from all eternity the Father, Son, and Spirit agreed upon the cross as the way they would redeem fallen humanity, well then the Son of Man must suffer, be rejected, be killed, and be raised.

Implication: God's Hand Will Never Drop You

- A. Does anybody feel like their life is just spiraling out of control at the moment?
1. Listen to me. Beneath all the hardship, beneath all the confusion and the chaos of circumstances in your life runs the plan of God. If you have been chosen in Him from all eternity—given to the Son from all eternity—you cannot, you will not, be lost along the way: "²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:27–28).

(2) The Promise in Scripture

Planning from Eternity & Promising in Time

- A. These things must be so because God has promised them. With the plan of God you have something from all eternity, something outside of time, as it were. But with the promises of God you have words concerning that plan spoken into history, into real time and space.
1. From outside time He plans our redemption. But then within the bounds of time He promises to redeem. And what God promises must come to pass.

- B. He's been promising to bring redemption by way of a Redeemer since the very beginning. Listen to how Jesus Himself grounds the certainty, the necessity, the must-ness of His death and resurrection in the fact that it was written, or promised, of Him before.
1. [Luke 18:31-33](#): Jesus says to the twelve: “³¹ See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. ³² For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. ³³ And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise.”
 2. [Luke 22:37](#): On the night of His betrayal, Jesus says to His disciples: “I tell you that this Scripture must be fulfilled in me: ‘And he was numbered with the transgressors.’ For what is written about me has its fulfillment.”
 3. [Luke 24:44-46](#): Jesus, speaking again to His disciples, now after His resurrection, says: “⁴⁴ ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.’ ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶ and said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead . . .’”

The “Must” of God’s Promise

- A. Now again, just because someone says something doesn’t mean it must be. People promise all sorts of things that never pan out. But, once more, that is the difference between man and God.
1. What man says might be. What God says must be.
- B. Paul wraps all of this up for us when He opens His letter to Titus this way: “¹ Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God’s elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, ² in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began ³ and at the proper time manifested . . .” (Titus 1:1–3).
1. God has spoken of our redemption from the beginning and, because God never lies, His word must be fulfilled. The Son of man must suffer, be rejected, be killed, and be raised . . . or God is a liar!

Implication: God’s Word Will Never Fail You

- A. There will be times where you will be tempted to think: “God has lied to me. He has deceived me. He has tricked me. You talk about His love, His compassion, His provision. I feel abandoned!”
1. Look at me. God’s word will never fail you. His promises must be fulfilled. He will uphold them at great cost to Himself. Even if it means killing His own Son . . . for you.

(3) The Problem of Forgiveness

Passed over Former Sins

- A. Here is the last reason I will give us for why the Son must go through all of this. I would refer to it as The Problem of Forgiveness.

- B. Now at first you might not understand what I mean by this, but I think the issue is made most plain in Rom 3:25-26: “²⁵ God put forward [Jesus] as a propitiation [wrath-removing sacrifice] by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”
1. I wonder if you caught the problem of forgiveness here. The crux of the matter is brought out there at the end of v. 25, where we read that God “in his divine forbearance . . . had passed over former sins.”
 - a. In other words, God’s been forgiving sin since Adam. And this passing over of former sins makes God look unrighteous. It makes Him look unjust. It makes Him look like He has no concern for His own name or glory because He has so freely forgiven people who trample His own name and glory in the dirt.
- C. If a judge let’s a murderer walk, knowing full well that the man is guilty, you pull that judge off the bench. He’s unrighteous. He’s unjust.
1. Well, God’s been letting criminals, sinners, go free for millennia. What kind of judge does that then make Him?

The “Must” of Christ’s Sacrifice

- A. That’s a problem. That’s a massive problem. The righteousness, the justice, the name, the glory of God is at stake in all of this. And it’s this problem of forgiveness that necessitates the cross of Christ. Jesus must die if God’s glory would be vindicated.
1. That’s why we read: “God put forward [Jesus] as a propitiation by his blood . . . [why?] . . . to show God’s righteousness” (v. 25).
 2. And he says it again in v. 26: “It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”
- B. How can God forgive the unrighteous and remain righteous? How can God justify the ungodly and remain just? How can God permit the sinner back into His presence and remain holy?
1. Answer: He puts my unrighteousness, my ungodliness, my sin upon His Son and exacts the just penalty from Him instead of from me—“propitiation”.
- C. This is why, in the agony of Gethsemane, as Jesus is praying alone with the Father once more: “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me” (Matt 26:39)—the implicit answer of His Father is: “It’s not possible. We’ve planned it from all eternity. We’ve promised it in all the Scriptures. The forgiveness of every sinner hangs upon it. And the glory of our name demands it.
1. The Son of Man must suffer, be rejected, be killed, and be raised.”

Implication: God’s Son Will Never Turn You Away

- A. I know that some of us feel filthy for what we have done.

1. But listen to me. Jesus has paid for it. "Jesus paid it all. All to Him I owe. Sin had left a crimson stain. He washed it white as snow."