

Ted Kirnbauer

Jesus' Self-consciousness of His Mission

The Bible is clear that the death of Christ wasn't an accident, but part of the predetermined plan of God. In Zechariah 13:7 God calls forth *His sword to strike His Shepherd*: "Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, and against the man, My Associate," Declares the LORD of hosts. 'Strike the Shepherd that the sheep may be scattered; and I will turn My hand against the little ones.'" Jesus Himself used this verse to refer to His death in Matthew 26:31. Isaiah 53 predicts Messiah's suffering and death and verse 6 declares "the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him." In verse 10 it says that the Lord "was pleased to crush Him." Acts 2:23-24 says "this Man (Jesus), *delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God*, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power." Likewise, in Acts 4 the apostles who had been released from prison prayed ""For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, *to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur*" (Acts 4:27-28).

The Son of man did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many; Jesus was self-conscious of this mission from the very beginning of His ministry (Mk. 10:45).

Ian Hamilton masterfully draws the implications of Jesus' self-consciousness out both in relationship to Himself and to us. He says, "Every phase of our Savior's life was shaped and styled by his self-conscious sense that he had come from heaven "not to do (His) will but to do the will of him who sent (Him)" (Jn.6:38). Indeed, it would not be over-stretching the point to say that Jn.6:37-40 is programmatic of the whole course of Jesus' life of covenant obedience to his Father. There he stands before us not as a private individual but as the appointed covenant Head of God's elect. It is as the One appointed by God to be his Servant and his people's Head, that Jesus declares his self-denying obedience to the will of his Father, to the end that he should lose not one of those given to him by his Father (Jn.6:39). This truth alone makes sense of everything our Lord did throughout the course of his earthly, and continues to do throughout the course of his present heavenly, life as the God-Man. All he does he does for all he represents (Roms.5:18-19; 1Cor.15:22). This truth is imbedded in our Lord's self-conscious sense of having been "given" a people to save by his Father."

Hamilton states that this consciousness of His mission "was a dynamic that molded the whole course of Jesus' life."

He then says:

1. **It measured the pace of his mission.** The whole course of his earthly mission was directed by a divinely devised timetable. The marked self-consciousness of living in obedient servant-hood to his Father reveals itself in a significant way throughout John's Gospel. Again and again we find our Lord shaping his earthly agenda not by the circumstances of the moment, but by the realization that the dominating, controlling motif in his life was a "decreed hour". At the wedding in Cana, he tells his mother who is expecting him to remedy, in some way, the lack of wine, "My hour has not yet come" (Jn.2:4). Later as the shadow of the cross begins to penetrate his soul, he declares, "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father,

Ted Kirnbauer

save me from this hour?' No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father glorify your name!" (Jn.12:27-28a). This led to our Lord at times strategically withdrawing from confrontation with his enemies. He was never motivated by cowardice, but always by a submissive obedience to the decreed timetable of his Father. Every step of the way our Lord knew that his times were in his Father's hands. This truth ought no less to measure the pace of the believer's life. Our times are also in his hands. Even with our different temperaments and personalities should not our lives betray that truth? The predestinarian character of biblical religion ought, above all else, to give our lives a sense of poise and unruffled assurance, even when all around us are losing their heads.

2. It molded the character of his mission. Our Lord had come to be God's "obedient Servant" and he avoided no necessary cost in fulfilling the willingly received commission given to him by his Father. As the perfect image of the Father (Jn.14:9), we see our Lord insisting on the costly career of inflexible obedience to his Father's word. Nowhere is this more movingly described for us than in his agony in the Garden and in its immediate aftermath. Mark tells us, "he began to be deeply distressed and troubled". He told Peter, James and John, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death". And yet, he embraces the cup his Father had prepared for him, the cup he had committed himself to drinking when the triune God devised the covenant of redemption. The terms of the covenant constrained our beloved Savior to walk the way of inflexible, but ever willingly given, obedience. Never imagine that it was effortless for our Lord Jesus to walk that way. Obedience to his Father cost him everything! For him there was no other way to live. He was living out the obedience he had promised to give to his Father in times eternal. Faithfulness to his Father required it; the salvation of the elect of God depended on it. The Saviour's servanthood was therefore a covenantal servanthood. Nothing less would secure for all his people God's decreed salvation.

3. It motivated the spirit of his earthly mission. He had come from the Father as his Servant. He delighted to offer to the Father the covenant obedience he pledged himself to in the eternal council - "...I delight to do your will O God". The fact that he was acting in obedience to his **Father's** will in fulfilling all the conditions of the covenant of redemption, drew from our Lord Jesus the motivating spirit that rendered his obedience pleasing to his Father. There was nothing forced or grudging or reluctant about Jesus' obedience. So much so that the Father split the heavens to say, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" (Mark1:11). In our Lord Jesus' life we see the pre-eminent value of "heart" obedience". We can never be reminded too often that our God looks on the heart. It is only too easy for us, with all our Reformed theology, to drift into mindless, mechanical, clinical servanthood. As the Father's Servant-King, our Savior lived "coram deo". This is the essence of biblical piety. This is why we read again and again throughout the OT that the most meticulous performance of God-ordained ritual cannot begin to compensate for the absence of heart worship and love: "the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (Ps.51:17 cf. Isa.1:10ff).

4. It inspired the unruffled confidence that impregnated his earthly mission, cf. Jn.6:37,39, 40. Our Servant-King never wavered in the execution of his office, as was prophesied of him in Isa.42:3. Never was our Lord for one moment uncertain about the outcome of his mission. This assurance meant that the whole course of his earthly life was marked by a sure, unruffled sense of what he was about and where he was going. He knew that his Father's promise to support and strengthen him by the indwelling presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit would absolutely be fulfilled. When he exhorted his disciples to be anxious about nothing because "your heavenly Father knows", he was simply saying to them what the heavenly Father had said (as it were) to him. This is something we all need to learn. Poise-full Christian living is not the fruit of a particular kind of temperament, but the fruit of knowing that our times are in our gracious and sovereign Lord's hands. "The Lord is my helper; what can man do to me?" Practical, godly, living, is

Ted Kirnbauer

imbedded in deeply understood theology. The doctrine of God, understanding who God is and his covenanted commitment to his people, breathes poise and quiet, unruffled confidence into the Christian's heart. So it did to our Lord Jesus, the proto-typical man of faith.

5. It manifested the loving, merciful attitude of God that was the animating pulse-beat of his earthly mission. What prompted God to send his only begotten Son to be the Savior of the world? In a word, "love". "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son" (Jn.3:16); "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Roms.5:8). Sovereign love to rebel, judgment-deserving sinners, was the fountain out of which redemption flowed to a lost world. It was not surprising, then, that this love was the pulse-beat that animated every step of Jesus' mission. When he saw the crowds, Matthew tells us, "he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matt.9:36). When the "rich young ruler" came to him asking, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?", "Jesus looked at him and loved him" (Mk.10:21). When the Pharisees expressed their disgust that he should "welcome sinners and eat with them", Jesus told them a series of parables culminating in the parable of the prodigal son (Lk.15:11-32). In this parable, Jesus likened God to the father of the lost son who, when he saw his repentant son heading home, "was filled with compassion...threw his arms around him and kissed him". The Pharisees could not understand Jesus because they did not understand that "God is love". Jesus' disregard for social conventions and traditional religious conventions was due to his compassion for sinners - love for sinners made him seek by all means to save some. The compassion that shone through Jesus' earthly life was the overflow of the covenant of redemption. It was this love, expressed in obedience to the will of his Father that kept Jesus on track and led him to embrace the dark, unspeakable desolation of the cross. It was our sins that held him there, but only because love was offering itself the just for the unjust to bring us to God.

It is a wonderful thing that the triune God should have resolved in sovereign, unfathomable grace, to love a world of lost sinners and save them. He bound himself to do so and fulfilled that "binding" when the Lord Jesus Christ made propitiation for our sins and rose in triumph over sin and death and hell. It is little wonder Paul exclaimed, "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God...For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen" (Roms.11:33-36)

Note:

Ian Hamilton's complete article can be found at <http://www.cambridgepres.org.uk/res/redemption.html>