

What in the World is God Doing?

For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: (Eph 3:1-11)

I love stories about good and evil. Tales of the fight for good, the eventual triumph over evil. Tales of courage, sacrifice, bravery in the face of growing evil, which leads to the triumph of what is good, stir all of us. I think it is part of something God has left in every soul. The story of history itself. The greatest tale of fiction cannot actually match the true story of good and evil – the story of the ages. That is what Paul speaks about in these amazing verses – The Tale of the Ages. Or you might call it ‘The Story of His Glory’.

For this cause – Paul takes the thought up again in verse 12. But the words ‘prisoner for you Gentiles’ leads Him to talk about His ministry. His ministry was to the Gentiles. He regards himself as the very least of all the saints yet he was made a servant of this gospel, grace was given to him to preach this mystery to the Gentiles. It was a mystery not revealed to everyone, but made clear now to New Testament apostles and prophets. The mystery is that Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body and partakers of the promise [made to Abraham] in Christ Jesus through the gospel. He now preaches the unsearchable riches of Christ, and God’s plan for the ages – that His name be vindicated in all peoples making up the church before all heavenly beings.

There is a grandness to this plan, an element of wonder that eclipses the most exciting stories we have heard, read or watched. In fact, I believe much myth and story comes in part from an original kernel of truth, far greater than the spin-off stories. It’s primarily a story about vindication.

Let’s begin with the core of the story. This core is the foundation of all reality. Everything in the created universe comes back to this core. It is God’s Passion for His Name. When we speak about God’s name, we mean all that He is. His name represents His character – His will, His purposes, i.e. – His glory. And God loves His name, His glory above all else. Don’t be nervous about that. God loving His name above all else is best news for us as creatures. God’s love for His name flows out in

goodwill and love to His creatures – desiring that they feel the benefit of knowing His wonderful character above all else.

Our corruption causes us to be disturbed by that thought instead of rejoicing over it. But think of it like this: Imagine a man, who was so passionate over his reputation as the very best supplier of medicine. At great cost to himself, but with great delight in proving how superior his medicines are, he supplies you and your neighbourhood with free medicines for life. Some people don't trust him, and go on being sick. Those who trust him enjoy free medicine all their lives, and good health. Now, would we say of such a man- "Huh, all he cares about is his reputation as the best medicine supplier. He's selfish. He's egotistical." No – that would be foolish. His desire to display His superiority as a medicine supplier was in fact an act that benefited you if you trusted him. Yes, his primary goal was his name, but it involved love and mercy to the people in the neighbourhood. His desire to vindicate his name blessed those who trusted him. So God's Passion for His name means a passionate desire for people to see how satisfying He is.

Many Scriptures can show us that God loves His name above all else.

Why does God save us and forgive us our sins? *"I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins."* (Isa 43:25)

Why did God deliver Israel? *"But I wrought [worked] for my name's sake, that it should not be polluted before the heathen, in whose sight I brought them out."* (Eze 20:14)

What is the security of the believer based upon? *"For the LORD will not forsake his people for his great name's sake: because it hath pleased the LORD to make you his people."* (1Sa 12:22)

Why did God not destroy Israel? *"For my name's sake will I defer mine anger, and for my praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off. Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction. For mine own sake, even for mine own sake, will I do it: for how should my name be polluted? and I will not give my glory unto another."* (Isa 48:9-11)

Why does God grow us and sanctify us? *"He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake."* (Psa 23:3)

Every time you see the phrase, 'for my own sake' or 'for my glory' 'to the praise of His glory' you are seeing the delightful purpose of God for all ages. He delights to show the worth of His name. He delights to show what a wonderful God He is – worthy to be praised, known and enjoyed. He delights to show the truth of Ephesians 1:3 – "Blessed Be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"

This is why God created the universe. He wanted millions of creatures to know and enjoy Him. As we read Genesis 1 we sense this universal delight as God keeps looking upon the created reflection of His excellence and saying, 'It is good'.

But in every story there is a twist. And there was a twist. In Ezekiel 28, we appear to have the origin of sin in the universe. In verses 1 through 10, God speaks to the prince of Tyre – a human ruler who had exalted himself. But then in verses 11 through 19, he speaks to the spiritual power behind the ruler of Tyre, whom he addresses as the king of Tyre. The Bible often refers to angelic beings as the king of Persia, king of Greece – apparently a reference to some form of dominion they exercise. Well, here God is speaking to an angelic being. In verse 13 we see he was the perfection of perfection.

In verse 14 we see he was in the Garden of Eden. Verse 14 makes it explicit – he was the highest angelic being of all, and had access to the innermost holiness of God. That was until the awful tragedy of verse 15. Iniquity – sin - was found in this highest of angelic beings. We're told what sin it was in verse 17 – the sin of pride.

We think we have a record of what was in this angel's heart in Isaiah 14. Here God addresses him as the king of Babylon – most appropriate since Babylon has always stood in opposition to God. *“How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit.”*(Isa 14:12-15)

Here we seem to have his name – Lucifer. He said 5 ‘I wills’. And in each ‘I will’ He was making a statement about God's name. He was saying God was less glorious than one of His own creations. He was saying God was not so glorious as to be the sole object of worship, and hold the unique place of adoration in the hearts of all of His creatures. Instead, Lucifer came to love his own beauty more than God's. He insulted and violated the very glory of God by suggesting that he, Lucifer, could take God's place.

We believe this was the origin of sin in the universe. This angel, created as one of God's worshippers, one who delighted in God like the others, one who shared communion with all the angels, perhaps due to his perfection, due to his position, due to his power, gave himself the glory and not God, and sinned. He was cast out of heaven, as Satan – the adversary. But so committed was Satan to his own glory, he convinced many angels to join him. He persuaded perhaps a third of the angels to join him in rebellion against God and in Lucifer worship. Satan and his angels were cast out of heaven, and hell was made for them. *“Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:”* (Mat 25:41)

In the meantime there was man. Adam and Eve inhabited the Garden of Eden. They were God's crown creation. And immediately, they became the targets in this battle. Satan believed that he was worthy of worship above that of God. So, he set about to have man join him in rebellion. And he used the very thing in the Garden of Eden which God set up as a test of obedience – the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Up to that day, Adam and Eve had passed the test successfully. They loved God. They loved His name. He was so good to them.

Now Lucifer introduced doubt into the situation. “If God is so good, why doesn't He let you eat of this tree? God isn't good, He is a selfish tyrant who spoils you with nice things so you don't challenge his authority. He doesn't want you to be like Him! He wants all the glory for Himself!” It sounds like the things we see in Job. Satan saying “Job doesn't serve You for who You are – for Your name's sake – You just have him lapping up all Your blessings.” You can see Satan's ‘theology’ coming out. He believes God is not worthy of worship, and man will not love God for who He is, man ought to worship and serve Satan. Suddenly, Eve thought of God as self-protective and so striking out for her own rights seemed right. She was deceived and gave to Adam to join her in her sin.

Now consider what the situation now is. Many of God's angels have believed that Lucifer is worthy of worship, and that they ought to be exalted to god-status equal to

or above that of Jehovah. Added to that, God's crown creation, man – the one who was to subdue the whole earth for God's glory, had just joined Lucifer in believing they were worthy of worship above that of God. God's name is taking a bruising, as it were. God's name appears to be being smudged, smeared and dishonoured. Perhaps there are questions in the minds of the angels that remained with God. Why has this happened? Why did God allow this? Why has God permitted His great name to face a form of disgrace? Why does this place called hell now exist, whereas formerly there was only heaven? Is God going to send all of man into this lake of fire as well? It looks like creation has been a failure – a disaster. What was intended to glorify God is doing the opposite – dishonouring Him.

Angels and men have turned against Him. How is He going to vindicate His name?

For reasons known only to Him, He chose fallen men, not fallen angels, to be the subjects of His great act of vindicating His name. The human race would be the main actors in God's stage-production, while angels, fallen and unfallen, would be the audience. Certainly they play a part too, opposing or serving God, but God is choosing to vindicate His name in the sight of the angels using man.

This then was the plan, announced first in Genesis 3:15:

God would use one man, to create one nation, out of which would come one Messiah, that would save all peoples. This body of saved people would vindicate God's name in the sight of men and angels.

God's ways are artistic, precise and beautiful to behold. When God wanted to do this, what did He do? Did He send angels announcing the Gospel to every tribe every week? God's ways are amazing. God's method was to specialise, so as to multiply. Read Genesis 12:1-3: *“Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.”*(Gen 12:1-3)

God was going to shape one man – to raise a nation. This nation – Israel, would be God's chosen nation. Not that He would not save anyone else, or that He did not care for other nations. No – He was going to focus on moulding and shaping this one nation to be the nation that would write down His Word to the world, and would be the nation out of which He would save the whole world. That's just what He did.

Israel wrote the Bible. Jesus the Messiah was a Jew.

But God focused on one nation so as to have massive effects. You see glimpses of His desire to reach other nations throughout Israel's Old Testament life: Joseph is sent down to be a blessing to Egypt. Egypt receives God's Word through Moses. Moses was a blessing to his Midianite father-in-law, who apparently knew the Lord. When Israel enters the land, Rahab the Cannanite is spared. In fact, certain towns were offered peace if they enter into total submission to Israel and their God. We see Naomi being a blessing to two Moabite women – Ruth and Orpah. God witnessed to the Philistines through the ark, and through David's great faith. Elijah was a blessing to a Sidonian woman. Elisha was a blessing to Naaman the Syrian, Jonah preached to the Gentiles in Nineveh. Daniel and his friends witnessed to the Babylonians. And when Jesus arrives – it is clear God's plan was to use the Jews to reach all mankind, not simply save Jews from mankind. Simeon prophesied: *“For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten*

the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.”(Luk 2:30-32) Throughout His ministry, you see inklings of this. His first sermon in Nazareth annoyed people because He used examples of God’s prophets being sent to the Gentiles and not the Jews. He warned that Gentile Nineveh and Gentile Queen of the South would rise up in the judgement to condemn unbelieving Israel. He taught, after healing the believing Roman’s servant, that many Gentiles would sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom. He deliberately used a Samaritan as an example of someone who loved his neighbour. He went to Samaria to win an immoral Samaritan woman. His plan was still veiled, for He told His disciples to only go to the lost sheep of Israel, but He was giving hints of it to the hard, ethnocentric hearts of His disciples. And when He rose again, He was explicit, Go ye therefore, and teach all nations. Ye shall be witnesses of me in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the world. The early Jewish church took a while to come out of their Judeo-centric view of God, but eventually they got it. God has used the nation of Israel to bless the world. The Abrahamic covenant – through thy seed shall the whole world be blessed.

And from the book of Acts to the present we see God’s plan growing. More and more tribes of the earth are being reached with the precious message of the glorious God. Millions are turning to Him and loving Him.

Now God makes worshippers out of rebels. He makes eternally grateful bond-slaves that love Him, and keep glorifying His name. Every time a human turn to God, every time a believer loves God, God’s name is glorified.

Now, we fast forward to the grand day that Ephesians 3:10-11 speaks about. This is, as it were, the final court case where God’s name is on trial. This is the final place where Satan’s accusations and God’s plan will come head to head.

Now notice how God’s name would be vindicated. Satan lays the charge that God is not all that glorious, God is no more to be worshipped than I am, he says. To that charge, God brings out the Bride of Christ. Millions upon millions of humans from every nation, from every era. They stand there as testimony, as witness, God is to be worshipped. God is worthy. This is the cry that rings out of the book of Revelation – ‘worthy is the Lamb.’

Rev 4:11: *“Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.”*

Each one of those people, through the drawing of the Holy Spirit, came to see the beauty of Christ, the blessedness of Christ, and they chose Him. Certainly God initiated, but they responded. And there they will stand as material witnesses. “These creatures chose My beauty over their own, even though they were not exposed to My glory the way you were. You stood in My very presence and rejected Me in favour of yourself.”

And Satan’s charge will be silenced.

Satan then lays the charge that God is simply a despot in love with His own rule. He was too quick to crush Satan’s rebellion, and commit them to hell. He is a despotic, selfish, even cruel God. He only loves His creatures if they love Him

To that, God again points to the Bride of Christ. There stands the material witness of the ages. God sacrificed Himself, to save people that did not love Him, and did not know Him, but rejected Him, and loved themselves. At great cost to Himself, He paid their sin price. At great cost to Himself, He sent His own Son and endured seeing Him killed by the very people He was dying for. God was merciful and gracious. The

presence of the Bride of Christ will settle the truth forever – God is a God of love. *“And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.”* (Eph 2:6-7)

We are eternal examples of God’s grace and love. God did not so love His glory at the expense of His creation, but rather to the benefit of it. He loved even those who did not recognise His glory. He is abundant in mercy, slow to anger.

The verdict – if Satan and his angels do not receive mercy from an all-merciful God, they are justly condemned.

Satan then lays a charge – it’s a stacked deck. The whole thing is staged. Like he said of Job – no one willingly loves and serves you –God. You force people into your service. We chose to rebel against you because we believed in freedom. You’re against freedom. To that, God will again point to the Bride of Christ. There will be millions of Chinese, Indians, Europeans, African, Arabs – the diversity will be an incredible sight to see. And they will be from every age – from Adam to the last day on earth. And the diversity will speak volumes- God didn’t cheat. The sheer diversity shows that God’s glory was accepted by people from every tribe and tongue. God forced no one into His service. Rather, He drew them with cords of love, and they came.

And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; (Rev 5:9)

And then the angelic beings will agree- *“And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.”* (Rev 5:11-12)

And the final objection from Satan will be: if You are so glorious and so sovereign – why did You let me exist? Why did You allow this situation if You are in such control? And then God will, with the Bride of Christ reveal what is sometimes called “the best-of-all-possible worlds”. This means that God has governed the course of history so that, on that final day, His glory will be more fully displayed and His people more fully satisfied than would have been the case in any other world. Simply looking at the world now makes us ask, ‘Why? Why?’ But God is not reacting. God knew that Lucifer would sin if He made Him. God knew Adam and Eve would sin. But God, knowing all things actual and potential, chose this way- because it would end up with the best of all possible worlds. To our minds, a universe without Satan and demons and hell and sin would have been better. But God’s way are not our ways, His thoughts not our thoughts. And therefore, the best-of all-possible worlds is what God unveils as the perfection in His Bride, millions, if not billions of people redeemed by Christ, to enter a new heavens and a new earth. God’s character displayed in ways that wouldn’t have been possible without the presence of sin.

And then, there can be no more objections. *“To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* (Eph 3:10-11)

The presence of the church will silence all objections. I believe it may be at this point that we will see Phil 2:10-11: *“That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”* No more objections. No more rejection. Everyone will have beheld the glory of God – His goodness, His grace, His wisdom, His justice. No one will object. All will confess. And all will acknowledge the centrality and supremacy of God: *“That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.”*(Eph 1:10)

Including – Satan. Lucifer will confess that God alone is worthy of worship, that God is Lord, and that his claim to God’s throne was illegitimate. Not that there will be any redemption on that day. It will be complete. Everyone will confess Christ is Lord, but those who rejected Him as humans will still suffer an eternity in the lake of fire, as will Satan and his angels. But on that day, as all who rejected God, men and angels confess He is Lord, God’s name will once again be vindicated.

Here’s the simplicity of it – those who call upon the name of the Lord, become part of His name. They become evidence of the greatness of His name. If you reject the name of Jesus, you will be part of those who bow their heads in shame, who are found to be wrong and on the wrong side on that day.

Just think – if you are a believer, you are to be eternal evidence of the love of God. Every angel who looks at you will smile and praise God. We’ll look at each other and smile and praise the wisdom of God for making worshippers out of enemies. God is jealous for His name. God is jealous over you, His church, His primary witness for that day of vindication.

Truth is better and more glorious than fiction. More and more, I find myself drawn to thinking about the romance of God’s plan, the drama of God’s story, the bravery, courage, wonder, and glory of God’s Passion for His glory, which will triumph over evil. History truly is the story of His glory.