

## **The Facts on the Ground**

Deuteronomy 32:26-29

Palm Sunday, March 28, 2010

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

A certain nation was fighting a war against a deadly enemy. The elections for president came up in this nation. One man and one woman ran against each other. The man who ran had idealistic notions about making peace with the enemy. If a truce could be negotiated with the enemy the war and bloodshed would end. He won that campaign. The people were tired of fighting. They were tired of their living conditions due to the war. They wanted to believe that he could fix it. They elected him.

Once he was in office, he met with his top military commander. He explained to the military commander what he wanted to do in order to end the war. The military commander told the president that he agreed with the president's idealistic goals. He wanted the war to end also, but he said, "Now Mr. President, I am going to tell the facts on the ground." He proceeded to describe the military situation to the president and the president knew that if he proceeded with his idealistic plan the results would be disastrous because of the facts on the ground.

We feel like we need to defend God. We don't like when people criticize God. When the radio announcer questions whether or not there is a God because little children in this world suffer, we feel a need to defend God. We may not call the radio announcer up to defend God, but we invent our little philosophical explanations for why children suffer. If any of our explanations do not lay responsibility at the feet of God, then we have defended God. We have explained the world in such a way so that God is not responsible.

We say that God allows suffering to enter into our lives. We do not say that God creates the suffering or sends the suffering. We say those things in order to defend God. That way when some one is suffering and they ask why God would let them suffer this way we have our ready baked philosophical answer for them. We tell them, "Well, God did not send this. God simply permitted it to happen." Following this line of reasoning, God permits earthquakes. God permits hurricanes. God permits cancer. God permits accidents. God permits death. God does not cause these things we say. God allows them to happen.

We have invented for ourselves a nice cushy God. He is a God that never sends harm any one's way. It is a God that never causes suffering. It is a God that loves everyone. It is a God that never really hurts anybody. It is a God who does not want His children to suffer. He is a nice God. He is never angry. He is never judgmental. He never judges. For if the God we invented for ourselves does not send death, but merely allows it to happen, then we have a God that does not judge. This is a God that we can be comfortable with. This is a God in whom we can rejoice. This is a God with whom we will never be angry. It is a God with whom we can love.

Now I am going to tell you the facts on the ground.

While such notions about God are nice, they are not the facts on the ground. Theologians float the ideas that God is always cushy and nice. That He does not cause disaster or plague. Philosophers are no better floating the idea that God just wound up the universe and put it on His shelf somewhere, allowing things to play out as they play out without taking an active role in the universe at all. He does not interfere. While such notions make God tolerable to human beings, they are not the facts on the ground.

You will not be judged by the God you have invented for yourself. You will not be judged by the God that the philosophers have invented. You will not be judged by the God that theologians have invented. You people will be judged by the God who is really out there.

And here are the facts on the ground, "I even I am He. There is no God with Me. I Myself put to death and I make alive. I Myself smite and I heal. And there is no one who can rescue anyone from My hand."

God does not claim that He allows death. He says that He kills. God does not say that He allows harm. He says that He is the one who deals the blow.

Jesus Christ proves that reality beyond a shadow of a doubt. There He is praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. The disciples are no help whatsoever. They are asleep. His enemies will not be a help either. Jesus knows that He is going to be crucified. He has predicted it on many occasions. He also knows that the only real person who can let Him out of the crucifixion fate is God His Father in heaven. Jesus knows that the only way out of crucifixion is to pray to the One who kills and makes alive, the One who wounds and who heals.

Jesus prays to His Father. "Father, all things are possible for You. If it is possible, let this cup pass from Me. Nevertheless, not My will, but Yours be done."

Think about what Jesus is saying. All things are possible for the heavenly Father. He could have found some other way to save us from our sins. He could have found some other way to bestow everlasting life upon everyone. He does not have to kill His Son in order to accomplish this. In a truly ultimate sense the crucifixion is unnecessary. Jesus reminds His heavenly Father that it is possible for Him that He be set free from the crucifixion.

Then Jesus says what He wants. He wants the cup to pass from Him. It does not take rocket hermeneutics to interpret that phrase. Jesus is asking His Father in heaven to be released from the crucifixion. Let me go so that I don't have to be crucified. Make things so that I don't have to be crucified. Protect Me from Judas Iscariot and from the coming soldiers so that I don't have to die. Jesus asks to be let out of death. Jesus asks not to die.

Jesus then wisely prays that the will of the Father will be done and not the will of the Son. Jesus knows to whom He is praying.

The next day after Jesus prayed that prayer, He is dead. He is nailed to a cross. Well, now we know what the will of the Father was. The will of the Father was that Jesus die. If the will of the Father was that Jesus die, then the Father put Him to death. The Father killed Him.

There was so much debate after the movie *The Passion of the Christ* came out. Who was responsible for the death of Jesus? I even judged a forensic tournament at a school where that was one of the debate questions. This devout Christian girl gave an impassioned plea that she had put Jesus to death because it was for her sins that Jesus was tortured and crucified. Some say the Jews put Jesus to death. Some say that only the Jewish leaders put Jesus to death. Some say that we put Jesus to death. All of it is off of the mark.

"I kill and I make alive. I would and I heal. There is no one who will rescue out of My hand. I, I am He and there is no god besides Me."

When you die, God has put you to death.

Now where are their gods? Where are the gods of the theologians? Where are the gods of the philosophers? Where are the cushy, easy to love, come in a cracker jack box gods? Where are the gods who only permit things to happen and do not make things happen? Where are the gods who only permit

the creation and do not create? Where are the gods who only permit death and who do not put to death? Let them arise and help you when you need help. Let them be a rock of refuge to you, if they can be. Let them eat the fat of your sacrifices and bask in the glory of your praise. Let them drink the wine of your libations. Let them rise up and help you when you are in trouble. Let them protect you.

For the God who had nothing to do with the disaster and therefore cannot be blamed for the disaster is also the God who cannot do one blooming thing about it. If God cannot be blamed for the cancer then He is not responsible for the cancer. If He is not responsible for the cancer, then He cannot do anything about the cancer. Pray to this "God" all you want and He cannot do a blooming thing for you. If God did not send the tornado, then God could not have stopped the tornado. If God did not kill, then God could not bring to life. If God does not wound, then God cannot heal.

So if you want a cushy god who cannot be blamed for anything and loves anything go ahead and have such a god. Pray to him, when you are in trouble see if he can help you. Pray to him when disaster strikes see if he can comfort you. Pray to him when death comes see if he can save you. For if people can be saved from his hand, then he cannot save. If no one can be saved from His hand, then He can save. The God who has power over everything, is the God who has power over death and life. He kills and He makes alive. He wounds and He heals.

Jesus Christ also proves this. The Scriptures say that Jesus entrusted Himself to the God who raises the dead.

At a different forensics tournament, I was not a judge. I witnessed a one scene duo dramatic piece. This is where two students perform a scene which has been excerpted from a play. Most students try to pick something dramatic and exotic to perform thinking that the piece is what will get them first prize and not their performance of the piece. So this particular scene involved a daughter who was thinking about committing suicide and her mother trying to talk her out of it.

The mother attempted to explain that suicide was a sin. The daughter replied that what Jesus did was basically a suicide. That statement struck me. Jesus committed suicide. He did say, "Nevertheless, not My will but Yours be done." Did Jesus commit suicide?

Only if God does not raise the dead. Jesus' prayer is fatalistic if God does not raise the dead. Ok, if you really want Me to die, I guess I'll go ahead and die. Even the musical *Jesus Christ Superstar* takes this approach. The Father is killing Jesus. Jesus goes along with it. It is only fatalistic if Jesus does not believe that God will raise the dead. It is only hopeless if Jesus does not believe that God will raise the dead. It is only suicide if Jesus does not believe that God will raise the dead.

Jesus entrusted Himself to the God who raises the death. Jesus is a martyr! Jesus is a hero! Jesus is a believer Himself! He believes that God raises the dead and so He gives His life into the will of His Father in heaven.

Then on Easter Sunday everything is finally made clear! Jesus comes out of His tomb. God raised Him from the dead. God presents Jesus to you alive! He has flesh and bone. He is not a ghost. He is alive! He is alive after He was dead! He is alive forevermore. Death no longer has mastery over Him. He cannot die again.

Jesus is risen! Those are the facts on the ground. When you deal with God those are the facts on the ground. Jesus is risen! When you pray when you have cancer or your child has cancer, those are the facts on the ground, Jesus is risen. God makes alive! God heals! When you are sitting in your basement waiting for the tornado to come and you pray to God you are praying to the God who makes alive! You are praying to the God who heals! Those are the facts on the ground. When your marriage is on the rocks and it looks like the relationship is dead and you pray to God about your marriage, you are praying to

the God who makes alive! You are praying to the God who heals. When you are dying on your death bed and there is no hope for you and the doctors cannot do any more for you and you pray to God for the forgiveness of your sins and for your eternal salvation, for your resurrection and eternal life, know this. You are not praying to the theological, philosophical, cushy God who never gets blamed for anything. You are praying to the God who is really out there. You are praying to the only God who can help and that is the One that is really out there. You are praying to the almighty God. You are praying to the God who makes alive. You are praying to the God who heals. Those are the facts on the ground.

We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that those who die in Christ will also rise again. "I, I am He. There is no God beside Me. I kill and I make alive! I wound and I heal! And no one can deliver out of My hand!"

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.