

Text: Hebrews 1: 1-4; 2: 5-12

Title: Jesus was always part of the Plan

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For as long as I can remember (and that includes all the history that I have read) there has always been a hue and cry over some version of this question, “how come there seems to be a difference between the Christianity promised and the Christianity experienced by so many?” Actually, they don’t put it in those terms-what you get are discussions of “nominal” Christians- those people who are Christian in name only. O sure they go to church , but for the rest of the week their lives don’t look any different than their neighbors- assuming that the neighbors are not terrible people or anything like that. Down through the centuries there have been a variety of suggestions offered to fix this. The early church Fathers talked about penance. The Medieval monks would have us fast. In Puritan New England preachers were expected to periodically preach fire and brimstone you are sinners sermons just to remind everyone that they should not take God for granted. The classic is Jonathan’s Edwards “Sinners in the hands of an Angry God which pictured God holding us over the pits of hell willing and able to drop us in. more recently we have been urged to adopt a missional mindset, or to embrace diversity, or rediscover spiritual disciplines. the list goes on and on.

Ok. I’ve got to tell you that I’ve always had a basic problem with this- the way that its phrased makes it sounds like it is the individual believer’s fault that their spiritual life doesn’t pass muster. Talk about asking the wrong question and getting the wrong answer! If someone isn’t learning, is it the student’s problem or the teachers? While spiritual disciplines have their place, I think it is really, really easy to focus in on what disciplines (those things we can do) rather than be continually amazed by the essential surprise of the Gospel.

Here it is. God is all knowing, right? that before the beginning of time, God knew the choices we would make. God knew that we would sin; that we would too often turn our backs on relationship with him and instead pursue self destructive ambitions. God knew that- and chose to create us anyway! God knew that- and chose to give us free will anyway! God knew that- and planned for our redemption from the beginning of time! The Second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, becoming human and dying for our sins

was always plan A! I've got to tell you, if I was God I'm not sure that I would make those choices!

This is what the writer of Hebrews wants us to understand. That all the things we do is informed by this basic surprise. He starts off by talking about Jesus. That's always a good place to start. Hebrews 1:1-4 is not so much a lesson as it is a hymn. Actually it is 1 sentence, a sentence in which each clause builds on each other towards the climatic declaration that Jesus is now seated at the right hand of the Father- and after suffering all that he did he is now far above the angels!

He starts with noting that God has always sought to communicate with His people. the Old Testament is filled with stories of visions, dreams, angelic visits and of course, prophets. But now in these last days we are told- God speaks to us "by a son." This sounds kludgy in English- so often we get "by his Son" in our translations. But the Greek has no definite article- the writer wants us to understand that God speaks not only through Jesus- but also by the relationship that Jesus and the Father share- sonship. John 1 agrees: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.*

Hebrews 2 builds on this. After reexamining Psalm 8 in which we humans are created *for a little while lower than the angels*, we are told that Jesus too was *for a little while lower than the angels*. This is one of those passages where we get our notion of fully human and fully divine. The point is not Jesus relationship with the Father- the point is that it is the Father's plan that we too will enjoy a son-ship relationship with Him- made possible by Jesus suffering, tasting death on our behalf.

I know, ot all sounds so Christianity 101- how basic can you get. We know this so well that we take it for granted, and are no longer bowled over by the surprise. For it is surprising! Jesus did not come to earth to suffer, die and be resurrected because we sinned- Jesus came, died for our sins, paving the way for our reconciliation with the Father *in spite of our sins!*

There is nothing that we can do to earn that. I have a sneaky suspicion that is why fasting, wearing hair shirts and all the other weird stuff we read of people doing

became popular- for in a way it was a way of saying that. "Hey look at how seriously we take this- we are participating in your suffering?!" Now that makes no sense- but it makes us feel better for we tell ourselves that we are able to DO something to change our relationship with God.

But we are deluding ourselves. no matter how hard we try. No matter how diligent we are in avoiding temptation and trying to choose good- sooner or later we fail. In a very real sense the Gospel is a good news bad news proposition. Good News- there is nothing we can do to earn God's love and favor and God gives us His love and favor anyway. Bad news: now that we have his love and favor we still have to do the good stuff! But now we pray, now we invest in others, now we seek justice and righteousness- not to earn God's favor; but because we already have God's favor and we can not do anything else.

I love all of those commercials for Publisher Clearinghouse where they show the Prize Patrol giving people these outsized checks to show that they have won the sweepstakes. They are always bowled over by the possibilities of have an extra million dollars or so. That is the closest equivalent to what is our by rights as we greet each day with the sudden realization that at the same time I am God's forgiven child- the one who is standing in the need of forgiveness. I have won the cosmic lottery! I really CAN do everything through Christ who strengthens me in the words of Philippians 4. Now I confess that there are times when I'd rather have the million bucks (especially during our Stewardship campaign) but the truth is, I have something better- an invitation to this table.

What better foretaste of what god has for us- a dinner invitation to sit with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Normally, on communion Sundays we focus remembering what Christ has done for us (do this in memory of me) part. That is still true- but let us expand our focus to give thanks for the relationship part- that through God's intervention, through God' initiative, through God's Plan A we are redeemed and given son-ship rights with the Father. This is all His doing, let us rejoice and give thanks.