



September 3, 2021

The Battle Plan in the Garden

"I, when I am lifted up from the earth [in crucifixion], will draw all people to myself" - (John 12:32 NRSV)

Jesus' will was invincible, but the victory was not without a great struggle. Indeed, he sweated great drops of blood from withstanding Satan's effort to turn him away from the cross. We sometimes see Jesus portrayed in the Garden of Gethsemane as cowering in the face of upcoming death, begging God to allow him to live, and unable to do anything about what would be done to him. He is depicted, in short, as a pathetic victim. But in light of who he was—and is—we would err badly if we were to accept this interpretation. There is no indication anywhere in the Scriptures that Jesus was afraid to suffer and die. He was not trying to avoid the cross. He was overcoming Satan. Once this was accomplished and the way to the cross was clear, Jesus was as serene as anyone you can imagine.

With humanity under his direction, Satan used people to torture Jesus. His goal was either to see Jesus die in the beating or to provoke Jesus into asserting his miraculous powers against those who were harming him. In either case, Jesus' progression toward the cross, and the radical act of redemption in world history, would be prevented, and Satan would continue his rule. But to Satan's chagrin, Jesus himself was in charge of the events and people involved in the story. He had "set his face" toward this goal—like a football player who sees the whole field and anticipates every move—to achieve his end of blowing open a carefully prepared but tiny cultural enclave of redemption and stepping upon the stage of world history (Luke 9:51). In John 12:32, we see a critical turning point in his career. We need to see clearly the profound wisdom of his chosen path toward his goal. This was the Trinity's winning strategy to break down the rule of Satan, and with its accomplishment Jesus stands quietly at the center of the contemporary world, as he himself predicted.

The events of Christ's death and resurrection demonstrated to his followers and other observers that what Jesus said about the kingdom and its availability was and is true. To live through and beyond torture and the cross in resurrection life shows the presence of God among men. Knowledge of this presence and the unfailing availability of God to those who trust him led Jesus to say all the beautiful things that we wistfully acknowledge but hardly believe to be true: all those things about birds and flowers being in the care of God, and about how we need never be anxious or afraid, no matter what comes, even crucifixion.

Reflect: *Jesus' basic idea about this world—with all its evil, pushed to the limit in what he went through going toward and nailed upon the cross—is that this world is a perfectly good and safe place for anyone to be, no matter the circumstances, if they have placed their lives in the hands of Jesus and his Father. In such a world we never have to do what we know to be wrong, and we never need be afraid. Jesus practiced what he preached, even as he was tortured and killed.*

(Q) How is he inviting you to follow him into a cross-shaped life as you consider the circumstances before you? How would you, as Paul says, carry around the dying of Jesus in your body, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifest in your body?