

The God of Peace

by David Orton

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And He Shall Soon Crush Satan Under Your Feet

At the birth of our Saviour, Christ the Lord, an angel appeared to the shepherds nearby, declaring the good news for all people.

And suddenly, in reply, the heavenly host appeared proclaiming in chorus:

“Glory to God in the highest,

And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.”

Luke 2:14 NAS

Christ’s birth heralds the promised worldwide *shalom* (peace) foretold by the Law and the Prophets; *shalom* as a Hebrew word meaning peace, harmony, wholeness, completeness, prosperity, welfare and tranquillity. As a biblical concept it carries the import of God, mankind and all creation living in peace and harmony under the beneficent ways and law-word of God—in fact, a universal flourishing, wholeness and delight, the way things ought to be.

Isaiah foretells this fullness of God’s reign on earth and in history in powerful prophetic symbol:

2 Now it will come about that In the last days The mountain of the house of the LORD Will be established as the chief of the mountains, And will be raised above the hills; And all the nations will stream to it.

3 And many peoples will come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; That He may teach us concerning His ways And that we may walk in His paths.” For the law will go forth from Zion And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

4 And He will judge between the nations, And will render decisions for many peoples; And they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, And never again will they learn war.

Isa 2:2–4 NAS

But how is this earthly paradisiacal state ushered in? Clearly through the coming of Christ, but is it the second coming or the first? No doubt I’m going to fuss now with your dearly held end-time schemes and scenarios. And so, please bear with me and hear me out.

I believe in the bodily resurrection and ascension of Christ and that he will ultimately return in like manner (Acts 1:9-11). We can put that to bed; I am not denying the second coming. But what I am denying, is the second coming (or the “Rapture”) as a divine rescue mission because of the church’s failure in history, because of its spiritual and cultural impotence as Christ’s body – the new corporate Adam, a redeemed humanity – to fulfil the creation mandate (Gen 1:28), exercising dominion as God’s vice-regents in the earth (Ps 8; Heb 2:6-8; Eph 1:22-23).

What I advocate is the complete realisation of Christ’s first coming and its significance for this historical space-time world—that is, for *now*. Our doctrine of Christ (Christology) must inform our doctrine of end things (eschatology). Christ’s person and work is, in fact, the culmination and climax of all redemptive history—the completion of all that was anticipated by the Patriarchs and the Prophets (Heb 1:1-3; Lk 24:44-47). The incarnate Christ is *the eschaton*—the end. The question that

must be asked is whether Christ conquered sin and Satan in history—that is, in *real-time*, in the reign of Caesars Augustus and Tiberius. If that is the case, it must then also be asked, how can his church – against whom the gates of hell cannot stand (Mtt 16:18) – be defeated by the same (sin and Satan) in *real-time* history?

When Christ was born as the babe in Bethlehem the eternal Word – all the majesty and wisdom of God – was enfolded in human form. And so, through his incarnation, Christ became the God-man and a new order of cosmic consequence was cast.

The collage of sights and sounds – of angelic and prophetic voices – that surrounded Christ’s first coming as the “Son of Man” (Hebrew, *Adam*) all testify to the reality that *shalom* is related to the majesty and dominion of God:

He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.

Luke 1:32–33 NAS

And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying: “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people, And has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of David His servant — As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old — Salvation FROM OUR ENEMIES, And FROM THE HAND OF ALL WHO HATE US; To show mercy toward our fathers, And to remember His holy covenant, The oath which He swore to Abraham our father, To grant us that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies, Might serve Him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.

Luke 1:67–75 NAS

10 But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; 11 for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

Luke 2:10–11 NAS

God’s dominion in Christ is first foreshadowed in the Book of Genesis. As the book of origins and the seedbed of the Bible, Genesis contains the seed of every major New Testament revelation. Augustine’s famous maxim still stands: “The New Testament is in the Old *concealed* and the Old is in the New *revealed*”. Revelation is progressive throughout redemptive history, beginning in Genesis and culminating in Christ and the apostles in the New Testament.

And so, when our first parents rebelled against the revelation of God mankind was not left destitute—all was not lost. God not only came to them in a pronouncement of judgment (Gen 3:14-15a, 16-19) but more significantly of promise and blessing. The first foreshadowing of the gospel (the *protoevangelium*) is declared in v 15b:

And I will put enmity

Between you [the serpent] and the woman,

And between your seed and her seed;

He shall bruise you on the head,

And you shall bruise him on the heel.

Gen 3:15 NAS

While historically there is much variation within the theme amongst orthodox commentators regarding this text, there is general agreement that it is a prophecy of Christ and/or his work, albeit with much detail to be filled in by its eventual fulfillment.

In the New Testament, John the revelator picks up the theme of Genesis 3:15 in Revelation 12 showing us a woman giving birth and contending with a dragon. John identifies her male-child – the seed of the woman – as Messiah who ascends to heaven as ruler of the nations (12:5; Ps 2) and the serpent as “the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world” (12:9). But the dragon is defeated and as it is thrown down to earth a loud voice in heaven declares:

Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night.

Rev 12:10 NAS

As a prophecy to the seven churches of Asia, John is showing them that in the face of the bestial onslaught of apostate Judaism and the messianic Roman state Satan has been definitively conquered—that the head of the serpent has been crushed.

While, as the seed of the woman (Gal 3:16), Christ’s *heel* has been bruised (Hebrew, *shuf* meaning crushed) in his death, Satan’s *head* is fatally bruised/crushed in Christ’s resurrection. Satan is hung on his own gallows. The very machinations of his Satanic majesty to destroy the seed of the woman – the death of the cross – under the predestined plan of God becomes the means of his own utter destruction. The death of death itself is accomplished:

Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself [Christ] likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil

Heb 2:14 NAS

The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.

1 Jn 3:8b

Having crushed the serpent’s head, Christ as the *last Adam* and the *second man* (1 Cor 15:21, 22; Rom 5:12-20) – the terminal point of the old Adamic humanity (in his death) but also the progenitor of a new humanity (in his resurrection) – is now restoring the Edenic paradise once lost by the first Adam (Rom 5:12-20; ch 6-8).

Paul, in his letter to the Romans, lays the foundation of the gospel not only for them but also, as the apostle to the Gentiles, for the church universally and for posterity. After progressively laying out the building blocks of his unique revelation of the gospel he interrupts his closing personal greetings with a solemn warning:

17 Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. 18 For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting. 19 For the report of your obedience has reached to all; therefore I am rejoicing over you, but I want you to be wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil.

Rom 16:17–19 NAS

Paul is urging them not to be unaware of the contrary elements that blow against the apostolic teaching of the gospel. This in Paul’s experience, and that of all history, comes from two quarters, either: *antinomianism* (i.e. anti-law hedonism / hyper-grace—Corinthian error) or *legalism* (i.e. gnostic-Judaism / hyper-law—Galatian & Colossian errors).

Nonetheless, Paul remains assured of *their* obedience to the teaching that they had received (v 19). In fact, the grace of Paul’s apostleship and what he could call “my gospel” was given for the purpose of bringing about the “obedience of faith” among the Gentiles (Rom 1:5; 16:25-27). Accordingly, the whole letter to the Romans – including the whole Pauline corpus – is *the* foundational and universal teaching for Christianity. Just as John wrote to the seven churches of Asia, Paul also brought teaching and correction to seven churches—seven being the number of completion and perfection: Romans, Corinthians,

Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and the Thessalonians. Paul's letters contain the complete doctrinal foundations and necessary corrections for the church universally. They provide the foundations for: revelation (epistemology), covenant theology (relationship between OT & NT), justification by faith, law and grace, ethics, the true identity of Israel, covenant community, charismatic conduct, new covenant liberty, the heavenly/earthly calling of the ecclesia, Christ's body, apostolic unity, and kingdom growth leading to final global spiritual/cultural transformation. This is "the faith once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3).

Jesus had "many things" still to say that the other apostles were not able to bear. And these things were held in reserve until he who would guide them into all truth – the Spirit of truth – was outpoured (Jn 16:12-15). And so, as the first post-ascension apostle, Paul was *the* chosen vessel to receive a unique revelation of the gospel – the "many things" that Christ had previously withheld – and carry it to the nations (Acts 9:15; 26:16-18; Gal 1:15-16; 2:2, 6-8; Eph 3:1-12). As Paul explained, the other apostles "added nothing to him". Revelation is always progressive, its fullness arriving in Paul. This explains why Paul's writings are historically and universally contended. As Peter admitted there are "some things" in Paul's letters "hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction" (2 Pet 3:15-16) whether they are professional theologians or not. Let me say parenthetically, theological degrees and pedigrees, while they can be helpful, are no guarantee against being "ignorant and unstable"; as one of my early Bible teachers used to exclaim, "*God deliver us from overeducated nincompoops!*" It is tragically possible to be a theological pedant but a spiritual cretin. Nonetheless, despite the energy surrounding them, Peter receives Paul's writings as "Scripture" (v 16). Therefore to minimize Paul, to re-interpret him, or pitch Jesus and he against each other – as some do (e.g. neo-orthodoxy) – is a "destructive" folly. Accordingly, the Gospels are not superior to Paul's Epistles and vice versa—they are all equally God-breathed (2 Tim 3:16), fulfilling their unique functions in the canon; nonetheless, the Epistles – in the progression of revelation – are a more complete unfolding of God's purposes. To lift Christ's earthly ministry and the Gospels above that of the Apostles and the Epistles is thus a practical denial of biblical inspiration. This is not a theoretical possibility. These are trends currently popular in various evangelical circles. In light of Paul's writings, we are to be warned.

My argument is this: *the victory of Christ in history and in the nations, is contingent upon our obedience to the revelation given to Paul—and thus, to the "whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27).* While it sounds spiritually superior to "rediscover the Jesus of the Gospels", to stop at the Gospels is to abbreviate God's counsel, and thus fall short of the mark. This same Jesus, under a unique administration of the Spirit, revealed the fullness of his purpose for the nations to Paul.

Thus, following on the heels of Paul's expression of confidence in the Roman's obedience to his gospel, calling on Genesis 3:15, he proclaims that:

The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.

The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

Rom 16:20 NAS

A salient lesson of history is that to win the *peace* we must first win the *victory*. Obedience to God in Christ through Paul's gospel and unique revelation will release the God of peace in his full majesty and dominion to "soon" crush Satan under our feet—that is, *now* in history, in this space-time world. We are not waiting for another order, millennium, or epoch. Christ *is* the *eschaton* (the end). His birth in Bethlehem as the God-man, followed by a sinless life, death and resurrection, and ascension to the Father, is the divide of history and the inauguration of the new order of God's kingdom on earth—the new creation under a new humanity; Christ and his body, the ecclesia, have now been given dominion over sin and Satan:

And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Eph 1:22–23 NAS

Nonetheless, while Jesus has already fatally crushed Satan's head under his *own* feet (Gen 3:15), succeeding where the first Adam failed, he now awaits our obedience so as to crush him under *ours* (Rom 16:20). It is one thing to have the *promise*, but

another to have the *provision*. Israel only ever entered the Promised Land through the “obedience of faith”.

God and history await the corporate obedience of Christ’s body to its one true head and to his *whole* counsel entrusted to his servant Paul. This will win the victory and so the peace. When this occurs all heaven and earth will resound as it did on the day Jesus was born in Bethlehem:

“Glory to God in the highest,

And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.”

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