

Whose Idea Was It to Put Jesus to Death?

Acts 2:14-41

Pastor Jason Van Bommel, Forest Hill Presbyterian

Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. - Acts 2:22-23, ESV

This is our second devotional on Peter's sermon at Pentecost, and we could easily spend far longer on this brief and masterful sermon. Last time, we looked at how thoroughly biblical and Christ-centered Peter's Spirit-filled preaching is. Today, we see how theologically careful it is.

We have a tendency to put things at odds with each other which God would have us hold together in perfect tension and harmony. Some of these pairs include truth and love, justice and mercy, personal passion and theological precision, and God's sovereignty and human responsibility. We see these pairs as opposites, and we feel them pulling us in opposite directions. God says they belong together, and we cannot have one without the other:

- Truth without love is a falsehood, and love without truth is actually unloving.
- Justice without mercy is cruelty, not justice. Mercy without justice is enabling and ultimately harmful both to truth and to the person to whom we're extending the mercy.
- Personal passion without theological precision is a mess of opinion and mis-direction that can mis-lead and exalt self over God. Theological precision without personal passion is cold, lifeless and ultimately useless.
- God's sovereignty without human responsibility leaves us all as robots or puppets and makes it impossible for God to either forgive or condemn anyone, as our actions are not our own. Human responsibility without God's sovereignty leaves us in a world of chaos and without hope.

To see more clearly how God puts His sovereign rule and our choices together, look carefully at what Peter says about the crucifixion of Jesus. God had planned for His Son to die for the sins of His people from before the foundation of the earth. Jesus' death took place "*according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God.*" This was an act of redeeming love, foretold by God in Genesis 3:15, Psalm 22, Isaiah 53 and several other places in Scripture.

Yet the crucifixion of Jesus was also the responsibility of the Jewish people, especially the Jewish leadership, and the Roman authorities. The mob had cried out "Crucify Him!" The Jewish Council had arrested and tried Him in a mockery of justice. Pontius Pilate had authorized Jesus' death, even after he washed his hands of Him. So, Peter says to the gathered crowd, "*this Jesus . . . you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.*"

Peter does not pull back from a strong assertion of God's "*definite plan and foreknowledge*" or of proclaiming the obvious truth that the human beings involved in such actions are responsible for their actions. His language makes it clear that the cross of Christ is both the greatest expression of God's saving love and the most horribly unjust action ever committed by human beings. His theological care to express truth accurately doesn't lessen the passion and urgency of his message. On the contrary, it intensifies it!

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the precision and passion of Peter's sermon. You taught him the truth through Your Son and Your Spirit, and he faithfully proclaimed the Gospel You gave Your church to proclaim. Thank You for the good news of salvation in Jesus. May we always share it with others with care for the truth and concern for the souls of those who hear. In Jesus' name, Amen.