

Commentary — From the Margins

The Righteous Disciple

Part Three

Hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you,
O people of Israel, against the whole family that I
brought up out of the land of Egypt:

“You only have I known
of all the families of the earth;
therefore I will punish you
for all your iniquities.

“Do two walk together,
unless they have agreed to meet?

Does a lion roar in the forest,
when he has no prey?

Does a young lion cry out from his den,
if he has taken nothing?

Does a bird fall in a snare on the earth,
when there is no trap for it?

Does a snare spring up from the ground,
when it has taken nothing?

Is a trumpet blown in a city,
and the people are not afraid?

Does disaster come to a city,
unless the Lord has done it?

“For *the Lord God does nothing
without revealing his secret
to his servants the prophets.*

The lion has roared;
who will not fear?

The Lord God has spoken;
who can but prophesy?” (Amos 3:1–8 emphasis
added)

3.

When Jesus was on the cross, He didn't know that the Father would turn His back to Him, that He would die alone, His fleshly body alone in the grave for three days and three nights as Jonah was alone in the belly of the great fish [whale] for three days and three nights. This being alone took Jesus by surprise;

hence Jesus twice cried out with a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani” (Matt 27:46; 50), His words being the opening line of Psalm 22, a psalm of David, with the remainder of the thought-couplet being, “Why are you so far from saving me, / from the words of my groaning?” (Ps 22:1).

The Father was far from Jesus when He, Jesus, took on the sins of Israel in this world and died for those sins as the Lamb of God.

Jesus repeatedly said some version of, “A disciple is not above his teacher, or a servant above his master” (Matt 10:24) ... if Jesus died alone, far from God, yet was resurrected from death three days and three nights later, a disciple can expect a similar separation from God to occur, a similar experience of God turning His back to the disciple, followed by a similar resurrection to glory, with God turning His back to the disciple representing a testing of the disciple’s faith. Will the disciple continue to believe God when all evidence is that the disciple’s belief is irrational?

Was it rational for Jesus to willingly be crucified if He didn’t truly believe that the Father was with Him and would resurrect Him from death after three days and three nights? Would His belief have been severely tried [tested] when He realized that He was alone on the cross, that the Father had turned His back to the dying Jesus? What would Jesus’ thoughts have been? That giving up being a deity and entering His creation as His only Son (*cf.* John 1:3; 3:16; Phil 2:5–8) had been a mistake? Certainly that thought had to occur even if only for a fleeting moment. He would not have cried aloud, *Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani*, if the thought had not been there.

If Jesus would wonder if everything He had done was in vain—and that is the reality embedded in, *Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani*—and if the first disciples, with the possible exception of the Apostle John, could all go to their graves strong in faith but wondering why Jesus had not yet returned, doubts about what a Christian believes are an essential aspect of spiritual growth: without doubts, the person is a fool, too naïve or simpleminded to yet walk as Jesus walked. The Christian must believe in spite of evidence suggesting that everything the Christian believes lacks reality in this world.

But what is the Christian to believe? And how will the faith of genuine disciples be tested?

There is a curious conclusion to the Gospel of John at the end of chapter 20: “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (*vv.* 30–31). But the Gospel doesn’t end with chapter 20; rather, the Gospel continues with the story of Peter and six other of the first disciples going fishing in the Sea of Galilee ... why would they return to fishing? Perhaps the better question is, why wouldn’t they? They were fishermen before they began to follow Jesus, before coming to believe that Jesus was the Holy One of God, the *Christ*; so if they thought that, figuratively, the show was over, they would have logically returned to their vocation to resume work that they had done before. Perhaps, the question needs to be asked: where did Peter get the boat and the net? Were

they ones he had used before he began following Jesus? If they were, then Peter would have had to ask his earthly father for their use or for their return? Or either James and John would have had to ask their father for the return of a boat, which had to be fairly large in order to accommodate seven men working its nets.

There is more to the story of Peter and the six going fishing than just simply the men needed something to do, or needing to earn grocery money by catching some fish; for less than two weeks earlier, Peter had assured Jesus that even if the others abandoned Jesus, he would not:

Peter answered him, "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away." Jesus said to him, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." Peter said to him, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!" And all the disciples said the same. (Matt 26:33–35)

Yet, despite his sincere belief that he would never abandon Jesus, Peter denied Him those three times before daybreak ... only John stood with the women when Jesus was crucified. The others kept their distance. And probably only John physically died of natural causes. The others were martyred, killed violently, killed prematurely in a testing of their faith.

Faith—belief of God—is not a small or light thing, but a hard thing, and the testing of a person's belief of God often takes a lifetime, with the person still having some doubts as death comes upon the person. To die for one's emperor or one's nation, to die for one's brother or family might well be easier than to die for God when the person has no rational basis for belief of God ... the scientist who is a confirmed atheist accepts death as the logical end of a life that has hopefully been well lived, an end that has come upon generations of human beings, thereby binding this scientist to his or her ancestors, with even the sun itself eventually dying, becoming first a red giant then a white dwarf.

The Muslim who hates his neighbor and brother, the Jew, with a hatred that governs life and dominates thoughts—this Muslim will live for his or her hatred, will bear children in hatred, and will die for his or her hatred, and will perish eternally because of the person's hatred for brother and neighbor. But in this consuming hatred, there is no room, no occasion for doubt: the Muslim filled with hate will die without wondering if his or her life has been lived in vain.

But the Christian has become pragmatic: yes, the commandments of God are good principles by which to live, but they cannot be taken literally. They must be adapted to the modern world, the world that really doubts that Christ Jesus will ever return, the world that believes the whole story of Jesus is a myth with flaws in its telling ... if God truly exists, then why doesn't He intervene to stop things such as the Holocaust? Why does God allow suffering? If He is God, surely He could set things right in this world. But if He, as God, has given this age to the Adversary for the Adversary to demonstrate that democracy works [in reality, doesn't work], that sons of God can rule themselves apart from the Most High, then we would expect to see God keeping His hands off the demonstration—and we would expect to see human beings worshiping demons as their gods. And indeed, that is what is seen.

Christians, Jews [now], and Muslims—all believe that human beings have been humanly born with immortal souls for which there is no physical evidence, with these souls going to heaven or hell at death. Christians profess that Jesus is Lord and claim that because they have made a profession of faith with their mouths their souls will go heaven immediately following their deaths. But what evidence is there to support such belief? The Bible doesn't support their belief. Moses does make any such promise to ancient Israel, nor did Christ Jesus promise His disciples that they would go to heaven upon their deaths. He, Himself, did not go to heaven the day He died. Rather, He went into the grave where His body lay dead for three days and three nights, and the servant isn't greater than his or her master. If Jesus didn't immediately go to heaven, neither will any Christian. All except those who are alive on the day when Jesus returns will go into the grave to await a further day—the Second Advent—when judgments are to be revealed (1 Cor 4:5).

Faith—personal belief of God—will be tested, with this testing leaving the genuine disciple alone and feeling alone for a period comparable to the three days and three nights that Jesus was in the grave. This period might actually be three days and three nights (a Thursday, Friday, and Sabbath), or this period might be three years or more, but the testing of every Christian will occur, with the Christian feeling abandoned by God during the period of testing.

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