

## **“Before Times Eternal ...”**

*“God saved us ... according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before times eternal, but now hath been manifested by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus ...”* (2 Tim. 1:9b-10a).

Salvation, we are told, does not come “according to our works.” We can neither design nor merit salvation: it comes as a gift from God. This does not mean it is “unconditional” as some insist. If nothing more than faith were required (which is almost universally agreed as essential to redemption), salvation would be conditional. Those who rule out baptism as essential to salvation, do so saying that baptism is essential to obedience, but not essential to salvation; apparently ignorant that they thereby make obedience is not essential to salvation. The Hebrew writer says otherwise: *“Christ became the author of eternal salvation to all those who obey him”* (Heb. 5:9).

Salvation is by God’s purpose and grace. Boasting in salvation is excluded by a law of faith (Rom. 3:27). Salvation by a law of faith makes the reward of grace, not debt (Rom. 4:3f). God purposed salvation in Christ before times eternal (*“before the word began,”* KJV) which means that neither the death of Christ nor the building of His church was a reversal or alteration of God’s plans for God, contrary to the claims of Premillennialists.

Christ was put to death as the scriptures had foreshowed He would be. Did not Jesus say, *“The son of man goeth even as it is written of him?”* (Mt. 26:24). Isaiah 53 gave several statements which establish these words: *“He has bruised for our iniquities;” “The chastisements of our peace was upon him;” “With his stripes we are healed;” “When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin.”* John the Baptist understood the mission of Jesus as very few of his generation did. He said, *“Behold, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world”* (Jn. 1:29).

God purposed before times eternal to send His son to lift man from the consequences of sin into which he had fallen. The serpent was told the seed of the woman would bruise his head (Gen. 3:15). Abraham was promised that all the families of the earth would be blessed in his seed (Gen. 22:18). True, the full purpose of the mission of Jesus to this world was shrouded in mystery, not even fully perceived by the prophets (1 Pet. 1:10-12). It remained for the appearing of Jesus to clear away the misunderstanding and doubts of His mission, but the purpose was there and God sent Him in the fullness of time (Gal. 4:4). Of course the fact that God predetermined His son should die did not relieve those from guilt who crucified Him for they

acted of their own volition and theirs was a hateful crime of crucifying the innocent son of God (Acts 2:23; Mt. 26:24). Just as God purposed before times eternal that Jesus would provide salvation through His grace to those who obeyed Him; He also purposed the place of this salvation -- in Christ -- in His church. Paul told the Ephesians that the church exists "*according to an eternal purpose of God*" (Eph. 3:8-12). It is not accidental that Paul wrote that Christ is the Savior of the body which is the church (Eph. 5:23; 1:22f). Luke records that the people God saved in the first century were "*added to his church*" (Acts 2:47).

Let none entertain the notion that Christ's death was not in God's plans and that the church is here as a mere quirk of fate. Let all appreciate the eternal truth that the grace of salvation planned by God before the world was is demonstrated in the death of His son. Let us never forget that the church is those who have been saved by Jesus. The man who says, "The church is not important," reveals his ignorance of God's purpose in His son; he reflects on the wisdom of God.

Jim McDonald