

But God Intended It for Good



Gary Wilkerson September 16, 2019

Near the beginning of Jesus' ministry, a group of religious people got so mad at him that they tried to kill him. While preaching in the synagogue in Nazareth, the town where he grew up, Jesus said something so offensive to his listeners that they formed a lynch mob.

A few minutes earlier, the same people had applauded him. He had quoted the famous passage from Isaiah proclaiming that "the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the Lord's favor has come" (*Luke 4:18-19, NLT*). Hearing this, "Everyone spoke well of him and was amazed by the gracious words that came from his lips" (*4:22*).

It was Jesus' next words that infuriated them: "Certainly there were many needy widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the heavens were closed for three and a half years, and a severe famine devastated the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them. He was sent instead to a foreigner—a widow of Zarephath in the land of Sidon. And many in Israel had leprosy in the time of the prophet Elisha, but the only one healed was Naaman, a Syrian" (*4:25-27*).

The congregation's reaction was explosive. "When they heard this, the people in the synagogue were furious. Jumping up, they mobbed him and forced him to the edge of the hill on which the town was built. They intended to push him over the cliff, but he passed right through the crowd and went on his way" (*4:28-30*).

Why did this so infuriate the people? It was because they built their identity on being God's chosen, and Jesus pointed out two passages where God bypassed his own people's suffering to heal and deliver foreigners. To them, it was heresy to suggest that a Syrian man and a Lebanese woman had just as much of God's blessing on their lives as the Israelites did. They felt justified in attacking Jesus. In reality, their rage was Satan's way of trying to stop Christ's ministry before it could start.

Have you ever felt taken to a cliff's edge by the devil for merely trying to follow Jesus?

Satan will use whatever means he can to take your faith to a cliff and push it over. He wants to do more than make your marriage less fruitful; he wants to push it over the edge so that it no longer exists. He wants you so worried over your finances, your children and your faith that your trust in Jesus crashes and burns.

Maybe you feel like you're already in a freefall. Your nerves are on edge, and your anxiety is off the charts. Your circumstances are so desperate, with no visible hope, that you feel like you'll hit rock bottom at any minute. Deep down you're crying, wondering, "Lord, how could you possibly deliver me out of this?"

I bring you good news: You're not going over a cliff. That isn't God's destiny for any of his people. It is impossible for us to be condemned by Satan. Our steps are ordered by God alone, and this scene demonstrates it. When the bloodthirsty mob was ready to kill Jesus, "he passed right through the crowd and went on his way" (*4:28-30*). I believe the Father intervened miraculously, saying, "I have plans for my Anointed One. You're not going to touch him, Satan."

The same Spirit who kept Jesus safe is able to do the same for us: "The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the

dead, lives in you" (*Romans 8:11*). We're encouraged that as we go through fires, we won't be harmed, that in fact we'll come out on higher ground: "When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you" (*Isaiah 43:2*).

All of us who follow Jesus face difficulties and pressures, things that take us to the edge of a cliff. God allows these trials to lead us to higher ground. They can be so intense, though, that you may think, "There's no hope anymore. Defeat is staring me in the face." God wants you to know that he won't let you be pushed over. The same Spirit who allowed Jesus to pass through the vicious mob can carry you safely through it. He doesn't want you to be manipulated by the enemy's voice.

So, how do we pass through the mob? Scripture answers, "It is not by force nor by strength, but by my Spirit, says the Lord" (*Zechariah 4:6*). Jesus changes our story by his power, not ours. Paul puts it this way: "The Kingdom of God is not just a lot of talk; it is living by God's power" (*1 Corinthians 4:20, my emphasis*).

Jesus steps in to interfere with the enemy's attacks against us.

Note what happened next in Christ's ministry: "Then Jesus went to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and taught there in the synagogue every Sabbath day. There, too, the people were amazed at his teaching, for he spoke with authority. Once when he was in the synagogue, a man possessed by a demon—an evil spirit—cried out, shouting, 'Go away! Why are you interfering with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!'" (*Luke 4:31-34*).

When darkness and death rule, Jesus *interferes* with it. We may think our life is approaching the cliff's edge, but Jesus faithfully steps in and says, "Not on my watch, devil." He interrupts the plans Satan has formed against us and prevents his evil intentions from happening.

The second thing Jesus does is he *cuts short the devil's work*. According to Mark's gospel, as the demon spoke "Jesus cut him short" (*Mark 1:25, J.B. Phillips New Testament*). The Lord wasn't going to give the demon another inch to torment that man's life. This means a lot to a minister like me who hears people confess tales of bondage suffered year after year. People describe to me decades of a bitter marriage, long estrangement from children, the grip of an addiction their entire adult lives.

If you've lived under some kind of bondage, it doesn't matter how long the enemy has had his way. Jesus wants to cut it short, to step in, announcing, "Enough is enough." The demon that tormented the possessed man was no match for Jesus' power. "'Be quiet! Come out of the man,' (Jesus) ordered. At that, the demon threw the man to the floor as the crowd watched; then it came out of him without hurting him further. Amazed, the people exclaimed, 'What authority and power this man's words possess! Even evil spirits obey him, and they flee at his command!'" (*Luke 4:35-36, NLT*).

A third thing Jesus does is to *destroy* the devil's work in your life completely. The tormenting demon cried to Jesus, "Have you come to destroy us?" (*4:34*). The destruction he refers to here means obliteration. Jesus doesn't just tear up the devil's book of lies; he tosses all the pieces into his holy, consuming fire so there is nothing further to harm you. "At that, the demon...came out of him *without hurting him further*" (*4:35, my emphasis*).

Maybe you and your spouse have attended marriage seminars hoping to repair your strained relationship. You got inspired; you put good practices into place, and you did well by loving each other, for a while. A few months later you fell back into resentments, arguments and tension.

Maybe your answer isn't just to pray and try to do better. Maybe Jesus needs to obliterate something that continually sends you to the cliff's edge. Don't be deceived; Satan looks to destroy every sacred bond, including the beautiful gift of marriage. The incredible good news is that Jesus comes as your advocate to destroy every evil power aligned against you: "No weapon turned against you will succeed" (*Isaiah 54:17*). Satan may fire arrows at you, but they won't hit their mark. No plan the devil concocts against you can work against the destiny God has for you.

No matter what your trial looks like, you are in Jesus' hands, not the enemy's. Joseph's words to his sinful brothers carry powerful truth for us today: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought

me to this position *so I could save the lives of many people*" (*Genesis 50:20, my emphasis*).

God is allowing your trials for his kingdom purposes. Your faithful endurance may even save others. So, don't think you're about to go over a cliff, because the opposite is happening. The Lord is faithful, and he knows when to step in to interfere with Satan's intentions, cutting short the evil works designed against you. He will destroy every trace of them in your life. Nothing can derail the destiny he has planned for you. He walks with you through every fire to bring you to higher ground!

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