

The "Proto-Evangelium" - The First Gospel - Genesis 3:15

Immediately after the historic space-time Fall of Adam and Eve, God, even in pronouncing judgement and the curse, promises deliverance through the offspring of the woman. In one cryptic sentence, addressed to the Serpent, God divulges the plan of salvation: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15).

An individual from among the woman's seed, namely Christ, shall deal a death blow and utter defeat to Satan at the cross, while Satan would bruise Christ's heel, that is, cause Him to suffer.

Two matters are brought out: the completeness of Christ's victory; and the inestimable cost at which this victory shall be secured.

The divine initiative must also be noted. It is God who puts enmity between the two seeds, between the children of light and the children of darkness.

The essence of man's deliverance consists of a reversal of his attitude, from hostility towards God to friendship. To be observed also is the continuity of the Redeemer's work. It extends to the 'seed' of Eve and Satan. All nations and generations are involved.

Finally, the outcome is not in doubt. Victory lies with the Seed of the woman, who is pre-eminently Christ, as Galatians 3:16 affirms.

The proto-evangelium, literally, the first gospel, is actually the first revelation of the Covenant of Grace; this was the first dawning of the light of the Gospel on earth.

How does Galatians 4:4 relate to the "Proto-evangelium"?

"But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem..." (Galatians 4:4; cf. Mark 1:15, "The time is fulfilled...").

It is here specified that the promise first made to Adam and renewed and intensified in detail by the prophets throughout succeeding generations has been fulfilled in the coming of Jesus the Anointed One. The fullness of the time is the time known by the Father and set by the Father, elsewhere denominated "the ends of the ages" (1 Corinthians 10:11), when the promises of God are realised, for it is only in His Son that all God's promises are yea and amen.

So Galatians 4:4 sets the seal on the veracity of the early divine promise, originally given to our first parents at the dawn of history. Salvation would come; and Israel particularly has waited and waited for it. But its delay did not mean forgetfulness on God's part; no, at the appropriate time God made good His word.

By the Fall, man became the slave of sin, of Satan and of self. But the Redeemer, the Great Liberator, would come; and He did come - and His identity is none else but the Son of God, incarnate.

There is therefore consistency and full harmony throughout sacred history and the sacred record (Scripture) vis-à-vis the covenant of redemption. What was early intimated has come to full light.

The Proto-evangelium - The Seed-bed of the Gospel

The first proclamation at the dawn of human history is given by the Lord himself in judging the serpent (Satan), and is recorded in Genesis 3:15: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."

Quite cryptic, but so very true as we see it fulfilled in history. I will develop the following salient points concerning the first gospel:

1. The divine initiative. It is God who puts enmity between the two seeds.

God, who exercises absolute sovereignty over all his creation, and works all things after the counsel of his will, knew of Adam's fall beforehand, having decreed it to happen. In his unsearchable wisdom God allowed this apparent defeat so that He will turn it to his own greater glory. Though the fall He will bring many sons to glory, not through Adam, but through His Son.

And this controversy that arose out of the fall, and which is still being fought out (the darkness not overcoming the light), God directs and moves to his own wise ends.

From the beginning, then, the godly seed and the children of Satan are set against each other. Though this started in primeval history, its continuing relevance for us today is undoubted. As children of light, being called out of darkness, we are meant to maintain this antithesis. We are to hate the works of darkness, and reprove them by coming continually to the light. "Come out from among them and be ye separate."

2. The essence of man's deliverance consists of a reversal of his attitude, from hostility towards God to friendship.

At its core, the Fall consisted of rebellion and insubordination to the claims and rights of the Creator over the creature. The creature was alienated from its Maker and opted for an independent and irreligious existence from God. Man made himself an enemy of God; in man becoming sinful, God's wrath and sore displeasure was immediately manifested.

Again, at its core, the Calvary Redemption consisted of a thoroughly obedient Man, as Mediator, offering himself and making amends for the failure of the creature. He became responsible for their misdeeds, and not only so, but in applying his redemption to his elect by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, he makes them willing to obey God's commandments and thus make manifest their reconciled status as God's adopted children. "I have called your friends....You are my friends if you do what I command you..." Christ declared his manifesto at his coming when he read from Isaiah: "To proclaim liberty to the captives" (in bondage to their own lusts and to the will of Satan), "To set at liberty those who are oppressed" (by sin and an evil conscience). As the Go-between, Christ makes us friends again with the Father (Colossians 1:21-23). Zecharias' prophecy contains in gist the same concept: "To grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life" (Luke 1:74,75).

3. The continuity of the Redeemer's work. It extends to the "seed" of Eve and Satan. All nations and generations are involved.

The Holy Scripture is Heilsgeschichte, it is the story of emancipation from sin to the pure and grateful worship of God. As such, the Redeemer, even in his pre-incarnate state, prophesied by His Spirit through God-chosen vessels, men who spoke for Him and on His behalf. They witnessed about his sufferings and his subsequent glory.

And now that He has appeared at the end of the ages, He continues his ministry through the promised Advocate, the Holy Spirit who applies his redemption, teaches the truth to his own, and sanctifies his people. Veritably, Christ's work extends throughout all human history, though he tabernacled among us for a short period of time, being clothed in human flesh.

Since all authority and power is granted unto him (Matthew 28), He is the one who gives eternal life to those who are given unto him (John 17:2). "The Son gives life to whom he will."

But this does not imply that those who do not belong to him by grace have no relationship whatsoever to him. Still, the reprobate, Satan's seed, are to bow the knee to Him and confess him as Lord (Philippians 2). He is their Judge, and even now rules over them with an iron sceptre, and at the Eschaton will shatter them to pieces.

Christ's relationship to both the elect and the reprobate is expressed fluently in Psalm 2: those who kiss the Son are blessed; those who refuse him allegiance will be the objects of his wrath.

4. The outcome is not in doubt. Victory lies with the Seed of the woman, who is pre-eminently Christ. See Galatians 3:16.

Humanity is divided into two communities: the redeemed, who love God, and the reprobate, who love self (John 8:33,34; 1 John 3:8). The division finds immediate expression in the hostility of Cain against Abel (Chapter 4 of Genesis).

The prophecy of victory ("He shall crush his head") finds ultimate fulfilment in the triumph of the Second Adam, and the community united with Him, over the forces of evil, death, and the devil (Daniel 7:13,14; Romans 5:12-19; 1 Corinthians 15:45-49; Hebrews 2:14,15). The promise of victory is reiterated again in thrilling terms in Romans 16:20: "And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly." Christ's decisive victory over Satan by his death on Calvary is historic and irreversible: "Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it" (Colossians 2:15).

The issue of human history is the unfolding of the scroll held in Christ's hands by right of conquest.