

God Knows Exactly What He's Doing

‘A man in his middle years was on a Caribbean cruise. On the first day out he noticed an attractive woman about his age who smiled at him in a friendly way as he passed her on the deck. This pleased him. That night he managed to get seated at the same table with her for dinner. As the conversation developed, he commented that he had seen her on the deck that day and had appreciated her friendly smile. When she heard this, she smiled again and commented, “Well, the reason I smiled was that when I saw you I was immediately struck by your strong resemblance to my third husband”. At this, he perked up his ears and said, “Oh, how many times have you been married?” She looked down at her plate, smiled demurely, and answered, “Twice”.’

Now, did this woman know what she was doing? Or, would you advise this man to ditch her immediately? If she was divorced twice already, would he would soon become a divorcee himself? Was her lie just a mild, flattering deception, or something worse? Who could make any plans in such a situation? There are just too many unknowns, too many variables.

But this is never the case with God. Looking at probably the most famous conversion to Christ in all history, namely that of Saul of Tarsus, which we just read in Act 9, knowing as we do the

results of that conversion, we know that Lord Jesus knew what He was doing all along. For Saul had a reputation. He was famous, already, and most definitely not in a good way. He persecuted the Christians, and felt very good about it. He sincerely believed that he was doing a good thing, works to serve God. But he wasn't. And Christ Jesus Himself appeared to Saul in a vision on the highway. Lord Jesus called Saul by name, and asked him point blank why are you persecuting Me? Instead of asking why Saul was persecuting the believers, Christ specifically said that Saul was persecuting Lord Jesus Himself. This shows us just how seriously Lord Jesus takes His promise when He told the disciples that He would always be with them, even to the end of the age. And that where two or three are gathered together in His name, there He is in the midst of them. Or when He answered a group of believers telling them that whenever they helped the poor and naked, they were ministering to Him, for He is with the helpless simultaneously with those who help in His name, the believers.

The truth of this begs a declaration about the current patriarch of Moscow of the Russian Orthodox Church. Patriarch Kirill is a staunch supporter of President Putin, and the invasion of Ukraine. Turns out, though an Orthodox Church seminary graduate, long before he became Patriarch Kirill, he was a KGB agent, who reported on the activities of the church and its members to the Kremlin. Documents from the Soviet era that became publicly available researched by Forbes magazine in 2009 uncovered this

man's previously unknown history outside of Russia. Thus, it's no wonder why he is so close to Putin, another former KGB agent. That Kirill views the Ukraine war as a holy war, and Putin's rule as a miracle for the Russian peoples, is no longer perplexing. What remains perplexing is how he can justify his stands with the teachings of Christ Jesus, Whom he purports to follow and be a primary shepherd of the Orthodox branch of Christ's Church. Not least of which are today's teachings. Kirill's utterly callous disregard for the literal millions of lives he's helping to disrupt and in the worst cases, cause the tortuous death of, is totally irreconcilable with true Christian faith.

So now we see yet another aspect of the true spiritual nature of this current conflict. Putin's and the oligarchs' corruption is one thing. The putrid corruption of Kirill's patriarchy within the Orthodox Church must be eliminated as Christ Jesus sanctifies His Bride the Church. The fact that thousands of Ukrainians are now coming to know salvation in Christ is a genuine blessing in this horrendous violence. And not just Ukrainians, but people in the surrounding nations are also being affected by the actions of Christians ministering in the dangerous areas, often at risk to their own lives. This is causing others to think seriously about the claims of Christ Jesus on their own lives. And this includes thousands of Russians as well. The trust of ordinary Russians in their state church has now been shaken as it's never been before. And among the millions of refugees fleeing this war, are literally thou-

sands of Russians who oppose the war and now fear for their own freedom and livelihoods if they remain in Russia under, in the words of one refugee just relocated to Armenia, “the Hitler-like Putin”. How ironic is that, when Putin claims to be ridding Ukraine of Nazis, he’s being one himself, using their playbook!

Speaking of Nazis, it is not common knowledge for those of us with no Jewish background, but Ukraine has historically been one of the world centers of Judaism and the Jewish diaspora. Long before America came to be a home-away-from-home for millions of Jews, most lived in Ukraine, and most of those in America today immigrated from Ukraine in the 1800s and early 1900s in the first place! But now, because of the current conflict, God is calling more of His Chosen People back to the Promised Land.

For none of this was unforeseen by God. In fact, it’s all part of His plan of salvation for the whole world that has existed in His mind since *before* the beginning of time. A major component of that plan was the conversion of Saul. As we come back to his story, he is blinded by his encounter with Christ Jesus. After being led by his staffers into Damascus, he fasts. And during this time, Lord Jesus gives him a vision of Ananias. Quite possibly, at the very same time, Lord Holy Spirit tells Ananias about Saul and that he needs to find him, lay hands on him in prayer, so that his sight may be restored. As Saul’s reputation had preceded him, Ananias questions the Lord about meeting a man equivalent to a Gestapo or a KGB agent, who would just as soon shoot you as

look at you because you're a Christian, a follower of this charlatan deceiver named Christ Jesus! But Holy Spirit says that Saul is a chosen instrument of God to reach the Gentiles with the gospel. Obviously, God knows something about Saul that nobody else does. Apparently God knows what He's doing. And the Lord condescends to tell Ananias exactly Saul's future destiny in building up the Church. Since Saul would evangelize mostly non-Jews, he naturally used his Greek name in place of his Hebrew, Jewish name Saul. So from then on, Saul is known as Paul.

And did God know what He was doing! Paul ended up writing over half of the entire New Testament. His "ivy league" education from the most prestigious "Ph.D." of the day came in so handy when he taught young believers about the new way of life they'd begun when they believed and were baptized.

But this same Lord Jesus Who suddenly stopped Saul in his tracks, in the days before Christ returned to heaven, before His call to Saul, He appeared to the disciples, well, at least seven of them, fixing breakfast for them, and having a public exchange with Peter. In a repeat of the earlier miracle when Peter was first called, the fishermen had come up empty, but Lord Jesus tells them, before they recognized Him, to recast the net on the other side of the boat. As if that would make any difference. But it had three years earlier, and it did so again, because it was Lord Jesus, the Lamb of God Who was making the suggestion. And despite the 153(!) large(!) fish caught in the net, miraculously, the

net did not break. And they were able to feast on some of those same luscious fish as soon as they got back to shore.

They shared a seafood meal with bread, in which Lord Jesus, in His resurrected body, physically ate. From this, we know that we will also physically eat food after we're resurrected. But it will be for pleasure, as I highly doubt that we'll need to eat to stay alive! After the meal, Lord Jesus spoke to Peter, and gave him the chance to express his love for Christ, not once, not twice, but three times. The exact same number of times that Peter had denied the Lord on the night of Christ's arrest from the Garden of Gethsemane. Again, all exactly according to God's plan.

Isn't that so just totally reassuring? Yes, we will mess up. More often than we intend and care to admit. But if we trust in Him, if we seek to hear His voice and follow His will, even if we mishear from time to time, His plans for our lives will never fail. While the apostles in Jerusalem refused to meet with Paul because they were afraid of him, not believing that he had truly converted, even after Paul had spent three years in study and solitude in Arabia, for they were convinced that he was trying to go undercover as a spy to identify all the Church leadership so they could all be rounded up together in one mass arrest. Not so different from Kirill in Russia come to think of it. But unlike Kirill, Paul was truly converted, and would become a blessing to them all, greater than any of them could imagine. All because God knows what He's doing! In your life, He does, too. For sure!

