

The Young People's Magazine

**Issued by the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland
Reformed in Doctrine, Worship and Practice**

“Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them” Ecclesiastes 12:1



August 2010

Vol 75 • No 8

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Cover Picture: Loch Muick in Aberdeenshire.

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Published by the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. Scottish charity number SC003545.

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Material for the magazine should reach the editor by the beginning of the previous month.

Subscriptions, Renewals, Changes of Address should be sent to the General Treasurer: Mr W Campbell, 133 Woodlands Road, Glasgow, G3 6LE; e-mail: wc.fpchurch@btconnect.com; tel: 0141 332 9283. The subscription year ends in December, and subscriptions should be sent in January each year for the following 12 months. Subscription rates, including postage, are: F P Magazine £19.50 (£1.50 per copy); Y P Magazine £11 (70p per copy); both magazines £28.50. All queries should be directed to the General Treasurer, not to the printer.

Free Presbyterian Magazine: The Church’s main magazine is *The Free Presbyterian Magazine*. Send to the General Treasurer at the above address for a free sample copy. See above for subscription rates.

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Vol 75

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“I Did My Best”

Dr Howard Martin was found not guilty in 2005 of murdering three of his patients when he used to work in County Durham. Now he has confessed to a national newspaper that, by injecting patients with too much of the pain-killing drug morphine, he did indeed cause at least 18 people to die more quickly. And perhaps “dozens of patients” were involved.

It should be obvious that this was wrong. Of course, doctors may give powerful drugs to a patient who is suffering severe pain. They may even do so with the knowledge that these drugs may result in the patient dying a little sooner. But they must be clear why they are giving the drug – their purpose must be *not* to kill the patient, but to ease the pain the patient is suffering and to make him or her more comfortable.

Dr Martin claims that he acted from “Christian compassion”. But to kill a patient is not a Christian act and it is not true compassion. No doctor has the right to kill any of his patients; nor has a relative or a friend or anyone else. The time of death is something we ought to leave in God’s hands. He has said, “Thou shalt not kill”, and we must not imagine that we can improve on His commandments.

“A vet would put a dog down”, the Doctor remarked and then went on to complain that, “under the current system, a doctor is not allowed to take positive action to help a patient” to die. But a human being is very different from a dog; a human being has a soul. And that soul will exist for ever, either in heaven or hell. The positive action the doctor should take is to prescribe whatever drugs and other treatment will make the patient as comfortable as possible in these last difficult days before death. And we can be very thankful that, in God’s providence, great improvements have been made in this area – what is known as *palliative care* – and it is now much more possible to keep pain under control than it was in the past.

The thought that it is kindness to send a sinner into eternity ignores the fact of endless punishment in hell; a holy God cannot leave sin unpunished. Unwelcome though the idea of eternal punishment is to those who reject the teachings of God’s Word, it is a fact – a fact which He has revealed. And He

has revealed it to focus our minds on the need to turn from our sins and look to Christ Jesus for salvation. If we do so, we will be forgiven; the guilt of all our sins will be removed; and we will go to heaven when we die, not to hell.

But what if the person in pain is a believer? Then, because in heaven there will be no more pain, surely it would be a mercy to release him or her, by death, from their suffering? In fact, it would still be wrong. We must still say that it is only God who has the right to bring someone's life in this world to an end.

David wrote Psalm 31 when he was in difficult circumstances. Even then he acknowledged: "My times are in Thy hand" (verse 15). He recognised that God was in control of everything that was happening around him; so he must be patient and commit all his ways to God. This is also true for sincere believers who are suffering severe pain and may not be far away from death and from heaven. Even if, in prayer to God, they do not repeat David's words, "My times are in Thy hand", they will act in the spirit of that thought. They will seek grace to be patient and to leave God to choose the best time for them to leave this world of sin and suffering. They can rest in the fact that God is good and that He will not leave them to suffer more than they are able to bear. They can afford to trust Him to support them until the time comes when He, in His wisdom, sees that it is best for them to die and to pass into heaven. They will not want any human being – doctor or friend or anyone else – to try to interfere with the time that God has chosen for their death.

In spite of all the deaths to which he has confessed, Dr Martin does not feel guilty. Yet he does accept that he will have to appear before God at last to face the final judgement. "On Judgement Day," he acknowledges, "I will have to answer to God." He appears confident that he will then be able to say what will protect him from God's punishment. "My answer", he told the newspaper, "will be this: that I did my best for my patients." But God will then pass judgement on the same basis that the Doctor should have used to judge his own conduct when he was attending to his patients during their final hours. The Doctor should have taken God's law as his standard – in particular, the Sixth Commandment: "Thou shalt not kill". This is the standard God will use. A mistaken idea of doing one's best for the others, even when it is honest, cannot protect us from punishment when we have broken God's law.

We have all committed very many sins against God's commandments, and "we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:1).

Is there any hope for us? To say, "I did my best", will not be good enough; God is looking for perfection. But, sinners that we are, we can never

achieve perfection. That means we must look for someone to stand in our place who is absolutely perfect. And God has provided Jesus Christ to take the place of sinners, to keep God's law perfectly on their behalf, as well as to die bearing the guilt of all their sins – whatever kinds of sins these may have been. If we trust in Him, we can go boldly to the judgement seat (see 1 John 4:17) and we will be safe for ever, sinners though we are.

Near Her Eternal Home

Lucia Marsh was a minister's wife. She was seriously ill and knew that she did not have long to live. For a time she had become confused, but even then she seemed to be thinking about spiritual things. Because she was confused, she imagined that several members of her family, not just her step-daughter, were around her, and she spoke earnestly to them, telling them that they must seek salvation through Jesus Christ.

It was spiritual life in her soul that made her so concerned about their souls. She knew that they must exist for ever and, even although her mind was not then working quite normally, she wanted them to enjoy the blessedness of heaven, not the terrible punishment to be endured in a lost eternity by those who will not trust in Jesus Christ.

Then her mind cleared and she thought about her own spiritual state. She contrasted the sin that she saw in her heart and life with the perfection that God requires in His law. She said, "It is an awful thing to go into the presence of a holy God! What if He were to condemn me?" Her stepdaughter reminded her of the words of Romans 8:1: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus".

But Mrs Marsh added the remaining words of the verse: "who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit", words which explain who they are that are no longer condemned. Those whom God no longer condemns live under the influence of the Holy Spirit; they are holy; they no longer live as ungodly people do. She knew that these words spoke of "a life of holiness, of rising above the world". She seems to have found it difficult to believe that these words did describe herself. She well knew that those who do not walk after the Spirit – who are careless about sin and about the glory of God – are still guilty; they have not been forgiven; they are still condemned to eternal punishment. And that is to be in a fearfully dangerous position.

Her step-daughter knew that it was pointless to suggest to Mrs Marsh that she had indeed been earnestly seeking to do the will of her Saviour. This was what others could see, but not what she could so easily see herself. So the

younger woman urged her to look away from herself completely and to "behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world". She first read to her step-mother the story of the brazen serpent in Numbers 21 and then the words of Jesus: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:14,15). Although she was so ill, Mrs Marsh's eyes brightened, and she said, "I see it all again, darling; how could I forget it? 'They looked unto Him and were lightened, and their faces were not ashamed.' I look to Jesus, and He saves me – precious, blessed Saviour."

At 3 am she seemed to be more seriously ill. Her husband was told and he got up and came to sit beside her. She spoke of the happiness they had experienced together and added: "Now it is passing away, but it will return in the presence of God". Then she asked him to bless her.

He did so; he said to her: "The Lord Jesus, who came to save sinners, bless thee.

"The Lord Jesus, who died for thee, bless thee.

"The Lord Jesus, who ever liveth to make intercession for thee, bless thee."

Afterwards she told her doctor: "Devote yourself to God", and she remarked that there is no happiness anywhere else.

He claimed to be depending completely on God's goodness – with perhaps a note of overconfidence, suggesting that his confidence was in his dependence rather than in God's goodness.

Anyway Mrs Marsh took him at his word; yet she added: "But we must depend in God's way, through His Son". She pointed out that the Israelites could not understand how looking to a brazen serpent could cause them to be healed of their wounds; no more, she said, can our minds understand how looking to a crucified Saviour can be sufficient for salvation. "But", she went on, "those of the Israelites who looked were healed, because it was God's appointment; and those who look to Jesus now will find Him to be the power of God unto salvation."

Later she told those around her: "If I may have the lowliest place in heaven where I can see my Saviour, how happy I shall be!"

Mrs Marsh was in the only safe condition in which to approach death; she was trusting in the Saviour as the One who died for sinners. But she did not want to rush away from the difficulties that people may experience when they are dying. She was clearly on the way to heaven, but she was content to leave herself in the hands of God to choose the time for her to leave this world, with all its sin and suffering. That very day she reached her eternal home, at exactly the time when God had purposed that she should do so.

The Scottish Reformation of 1560

3. Problems with Bishops

Rev D W B Somerset

Last month's article in this series pointed out some of the problems with priests in Scotland before the Reformation – their sin, their ignorance and their irreverence. These were three of the seven points made by David Hay Fleming, who wrote about the history of the Scottish Church.

4. *Conferring of Benefices.* In his list of seven corrupt features of the pre-Reformation Church in Scotland, the fourth one David Hay Fleming mentioned is “the conferring of benefices” – that is, giving of important positions in the Church, such as those of bishops, to people who were wholly unsuitable.

Benefices were given to whoever could obtain them, even if they were highly unsuitable. Sometimes they were given to very young men, even to boys. In 1498 James IV appointed his brother, aged about 22, as Archbishop of St Andrews. The brother died in 1504 and, in his place, James appointed his own illegitimate son Alexander, then aged about 14. Similarly, the Protestant martyr Patrick Hamilton, who belonged to a wealthy family, was given the position of Abbot of Fearn Abbey when he was 13. The income from some of these church positions was huge and there was usually a power struggle when one of them became vacant.

The most famous such power struggle was the competition for the Archbishopric of St Andrews after the catastrophic defeat at the Battle of Flodden on 9 September 1513. Many important Scots were killed, including King James IV, and many very valuable church positions became vacant. Among those who died in the battle was Alexander, mentioned above, and greedy eyes were turned towards the Archbishopric of St Andrews. The contest involved most of Scotland, Henry VIII of England, the King of France and the Pope.

The first move for filling the vacancy was taken by the Pope, Leo X, who, on October 13, appointed his nephew Cardinal Innocenzo Cibo as the new Archbishop. But immediately afterwards the Pope received a letter in the name of the infant Scottish king, James V, requesting that the privileges of the Scottish crown in choosing the Archbishop of St Andrews might be maintained. The Pope replied by congratulating the king and assuring him that the privileges would indeed be observed. The appointment of Cibo was quietly forgotten.

With Cibo out of the field, the struggle centred on five contenders in Scotland. The first of these was William Elphinstone, Bishop of Aberdeen.

At the end of the year he was elected the new Archbishop by the Chapter of St Andrews, the body which had the right to make the choice. He also had the support of the Dowager Queen Margaret, who had begun to rule over Scotland (she was the widow of James IV, and sister of Henry VIII of England). But the Pope refused to accept him. In terms of general character, Elphinstone was by far the most suitable of the candidates, but he was already well over 80 and he died the following October, before the dispute had been resolved. His death meant that the Bishopric of Aberdeen was also vacant, adding to the intensity of the struggle.

The Pope's choice, after Cibo, was Andrew Forman, who was the Bishop of Moray. He was a Scot, but he lived in France, where he held the Archbishopric of Bourges. He was extremely wealthy but was highly unpopular in Scotland and was held to be largely responsible for the defeat at Flodden. Although he had no support in Scotland he was the eventual winner of the contest.

The next candidate to be mentioned was James Beaton. He was already the Archbishop of Glasgow and had become the Chancellor of Scotland after the Battle of Flodden and was thus one of the most powerful men in the kingdom. He made a private approach to the Pope, supported by several of the nobles of the west of Scotland, but on this occasion he failed and Forman was successful. Beaton finally secured his ambition of becoming Archbishop of St Andrews after Forman's death in 1522.

After Elphinstone's death in October 1514, two other candidates emerged in Gavin Douglas and John Hepburn. Douglas was the new choice of the Dowager Queen Margaret, and on the strength of this, he took possession of the Castle of St Andrews, which was the Bishop's Palace. The Chapter of St Andrew's, however, elected Hepburn, who was the Prior of St Andrews, and in November Hepburn besieged the Castle. The Dowager Queen asked her brother Henry VIII to send a fleet to help Douglas, but this did not happen and Hepburn soon captured the Castle and installed a garrison of soldiers.

Henry VIII did twice write to the Pope on behalf of Douglas. There was also a proposal from Douglas that Henry VIII should write to the King of France asking him to hand over Forman, who could then be held prisoner. In the event it was Douglas himself who was imprisoned for many months by the Regent Albany, who had taken over the government of Scotland in May 1515.

Meanwhile Forman had great difficulty in returning to Scotland, largely through the opposition of Henry VIII. Papal Bulls (or proclamations) were sent to Scotland in January 1515 declaring him to be the new Archbishop, but Hepburn was sufficiently powerful to prevent these from being published

in Fife. In May 1515 Hepburn visited the Pope to press his own claims, but without success, and the following month Forman finally arrived in Scotland. But Hepburn contrived to have him confined to the Priory of Pittenweem for several months, and it was not until February 1516 that Forman was finally settled as Archbishop of St Andrews. The turmoil had lasted nearly two and a half years.

As part of the deal, Forman paid Hepburn a large sum of money and handed over the Bishopric of Moray to Hepburn's brother James. He also yielded up to Beaton the Abbacy of Aberbrothock, the source of a large income. Douglas got the Bishopric of Dunkeld, once he was released from prison. The Bishopric of Aberdeen went to Alexander Gordon, the cousin of the Earl of Huntly who had put pressure on the Chapter of Aberdeen by appearing with weapons at the election. Thus everybody was contented for the time being. On a lesser scale, political manoeuvring of this sort took place whenever there was an important church vacancy. What a far cry all this was from the Word of God: "A bishop then must be blameless . . . not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous" (1 Tim 3:2-3). The need for reform was desperate.

David Brainerd's Questions

1. The Benefits Believers Receive from Christ at Death

David Brainerd was a pioneering missionary among groups of American Indians in the 1720s. In teaching the people the doctrines of the Bible, he sometimes asked them questions based around one of the answers in the *Shorter Catechism*; they are slightly edited. Here he is using Question 37: "What benefits do believers receive from Christ at death? Answer: The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united in Christ, do rest in their graves, till the resurrection." Brainerd says that his questions "were all answered with surprising readiness". Some of the people were very much impressed at the thought of the blessedness of heaven.

- Q. I have shown you that the children of God receive a great many good things from Christ while they live. Now have they any more to receive when they come to die?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Are the children of God then made perfectly free from sin?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Do you think they will never more be troubled with vain, foolish and wicked thoughts?
- A. No, never at all.

- Q. Will they not then be like the good angels I have so often told you about?
A. Yes.
- Q. And do you think it is a great thing to be freed from all sin?
A. Yes.
- Q. Do all God's children think so?
A. Yes, all of them.
- Q. Do you think this is what they would ask for above all things if God should say to them, Ask what you will, and it shall be done for you?
A. O yes, to be sure, that is what they want.
- Q. You say the souls of God's people at death are made perfectly free from sin; where do they go then?
A. They go and live with Jesus Christ.
- Q. Does Christ show them more respect and honour, and make them more happy, than we can possibly think of in this world?
A. Yes.
- Q. Do they go immediately to live with Christ in heaven as soon as their bodies are dead, or do they stay somewhere else for a while?
A. They go immediately to Christ.
- Q. Does Christ take any care of the bodies of His people when they are dead and their souls have gone to heaven, or does He forget them?
A. He takes care of them.
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The Gap in the Middle of Your Bible

2. The Age of Empires

Andrew R Middleton

Last month's article very quickly summarised Old Testament history, which ends around 400 BC and pointed to the gap between that point and when the New Testament begins. This second part is not going to start at 400 BC, where the grand historical sweep in the first part ended. Instead, we are going to survey, in a little more detail, the history of the period of just over 200 years, beginning in 613 BC, before the gap. This will provide the background for later articles in this series.

If you could travel back in time to 613 BC, you would see that Israel was perched in a somewhat dangerous position. There were two great kingdoms in this ancient world – the superpowers of their day – Egypt and Assyria. North of Assyria (modern Syria) lay the wealthy Kingdom of Lydia (part of modern Turkey) which was governed from Sardis and managed the Greek trading ports of Ephesus and Miletus. While these are very familiar names for the New Testament Church, at that time they were only beginning to be

recognised by many in the ancient world. This Lydian kingdom represents the first intrusion of Europeans into the ancient world. Unfortunately for the kingdom of Israel, as Egypt marched north towards Assyria, the only two stops along the route were in the land of the Philistines and in the mainland of Israel. It is little wonder that the Bible story is so often full of the defence of the realm against the empire-building of these nations.

In 612 BC, there was a major shift in the balance of power. The Assyrians had been having some trouble from the Chaldeans, who were based in Babylon (south-west Iraq). After 14 years of armed revolt, the Chaldeans were getting the upper hand and were beginning to found their own independent territory. In 612 the rebel leader Nabopolassar joined forces with Cyaxerxes the Mede (the Median empire stretched across the north of Iraq, Iran and down into modern Afghanistan and Pakistan). This alliance marched on the Assyrian capital at Nineveh and destroyed it. The fall of Assyria was swift and was soon followed by the collapse of the Median and Babylonian alliance. While the Medes returned home, the Babylonians pressed home their advantage, and Nabopolassar's son, Nebuchadnezzar, marched west, capturing the Assyrian empire. The Assyrian army retreated to Haran, where in 610 BC it again fell before the Babylonians.

Egypt, the other superpower, became involved and tried to prevent the spread of the Babylonians. In 609 BC, Pharaoh Necho sent his armies north to assist the crippled Assyrians. King Josiah of Judah unsuccessfully tried to halt this Egyptian army marching through his lands and died in the attempt, at the fortress of Megiddo. The combined Egyptian and Assyrian armies fell before Nebuchadnezzar at both Carchemish and Hamath. At this point, with the Babylonian empire stretching out across the known world, Nebuchadnezzar's father died and he marched back to Babylon to claim his throne.

The defeated Egyptians saw the opportunity to control Palestine and deposed Jehoahaz the son of Josiah. Necho replaced him with Eliakim (one of his brothers) whom he renamed Jehoiakim. Judah was now under Egyptian influence. Meanwhile, Nebuchadnezzar knew that the threat from Egypt remained, and after four years in power he marched against it. Jehoiakim was clearly frightened by the presence of these Babylonian armies moving toward Egypt and preferred to pay them tribute as a way of retaining his office. After a heavy battle between the Egyptians and Babylonians, which ended in stalemate, Nebuchadnezzar returned east.

Jehoiakim, trying to retain his position and, moving his policies with the prevailing wind, rebelled and sought to hide under Egypt's wing. In 598 BC, the Babylonians were once more on the move, heading back towards Egypt

with a huge army. The Judeans were now caught in the crossfire, and at this point Jehoiakim died (he was probably assassinated in an attempt to rescue the country from Babylonian anger (see Jeremiah 22:19)). Jehoiachin, his son, took the throne and within three months was taken to Babylon as a captive. Nebuchadnezzar installed Jehoiachin's uncle Mattaniah (renamed Zedekiah) on the throne. In 593 BC, Pharaoh Necho died and was succeeded by Psammetichus II. Zedekiah led a small revolt by the Palestinian states against the Babylonians, hoping to return to Egyptian protection, but the new Pharaoh did not support him. At this point Zedekiah realised he was exposed, and travelled to Babylon to promise allegiance.

Although Jeremiah told Zedekiah and the people to remain loyal to the Babylonians, many Judeans felt they should rebel and assert their independence. In 588 BC, the short-lived Psammetichus died and was followed by Pharaoh Apries (Hophra) who meddled in the affairs of the Palestinian states, encouraging them to rebel. Zedekiah rebelled a second time and Nebuchadnezzar reacted fiercely. By the end of January 588 BC, Jerusalem was under siege and in 587 BC the end came. Zedekiah was given the gruesome punishment of having his sons executed in front of him before he was blinded and taken to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar was clearly determined to subdue Jerusalem for good, and it was burnt; its walls were destroyed; the Temple was robbed; the palace was broken down; and the military, civil and religious leaders were taken to Riblah and executed. The Jewish population was then exiled to Babylon, and Judah lost its independence.

In exile the Jews were permitted to form small colonies in which they tried to continue life as normal. It is little wonder that, in this condition, they wept when they remembered Zion. In exile, the Jews, who spoke Hebrew, learnt the Aramaic language and on their return took this language with them. Aramaic stayed as the ordinary language of Palestine until the Arab conquest of the seventh century AD.

The Jews worshipped in the temple, and before that in the tabernacle at Shiloh. Jerusalem was considered to be the only appropriate place for the temple, so no attempt was made to build a temple in Babylon. The exiles met for fellowship, with prayer and Bible study, and out of this practical need grew the institution of the synagogue. The synagogue became the centre of Jewish life – with its readings of the Torah (the law of Moses). Godly Daniel is still seen to be praying three times a day with his face towards Jerusalem. The exile was the scene of some of the best-known Bible stories, with Daniel in the lions' den, the three men in the fiery furnace and, of course, Queen Esther.

The synagogue was the meeting place of Judaism in the stand against

being absorbed by the peoples of Babylon and it has remained as a rallying point for Jews spread across the world down to the present day. It was in synagogues that Jesus spoke and Paul preached. They were used as a vehicle for the spread of the Christian gospel under the early Church. We can see that, in the Lord's providence, the exile to Babylon was used for the creation of synagogues. And in the midst of oppression, the Lord was providing the means for the future spread of modern Christianity. During this period in exile the Jews were convinced that idolatry (which had been a temptation to their forefathers) was something evil, not just for Jews but also for Gentiles. Judaism became a missionary religion and it saw a growing number of converts or "God-fearers" becoming associated with it.

Only One Way of Salvation

4. Because of What the Bible Is

J C Ryle

This is a series taken from Ryle's book, *Knots Untied*, and is based on the verse: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). It has been edited. Ryle is now giving some reasons why the teaching of the text must be true. He has already given two reasons: because of what man is, and because of what God is.

My third reason why this doctrine must be true is: *because the Bible is what the Bible is*. If we do not believe this teaching, we must give up the Bible as the only rule of faith. All through the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, there is only one simple account of the way in which man must be saved. It is always the same: only for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, through faith; not for our own works or for what we deserve.

We see it dimly revealed at first: it looms through the mist of a few promises; but it is there. We have it more plainly afterwards: it is taught by the pictures and emblems of the law of Moses. We later have it still more clearly: the prophets saw in vision many particulars about the Redeemer yet to come. We have it fully at last in the sunshine of New Testament history: Christ in human nature, Christ crucified, Christ rising again, Christ preached to the world.

But one golden chain runs through the whole volume: no salvation except by Jesus Christ. The bruising of the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15), foretold on the day of the Fall; the clothing of our first parents with skins; the sacrifices of Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – all are so many witnesses to the truth set forth in the text. So are the passover and all the details of the Jewish law

– the high priest, the altar, the daily offering of the lamb, the holy of holies entered only by blood, the scapegoat, the cities of refuge. All preach with one voice that salvation is only by Jesus Christ.

In fact, this truth appears to be the great object of the Bible, and all the different parts of the Book are meant to pour light upon it. I can gather from it no ideas of pardon and peace with God except in connection with this truth. If I could read of one soul in it who was saved without faith in a Saviour, I might perhaps not speak so confidently.

But when I see that faith in Christ, whether a coming Christ or a crucified Christ, was the prominent feature in the religion of all who went to heaven, when I see Abel owning Christ in his better sacrifice at one end of the Bible, and the saints in glory in John's vision rejoicing in Christ at the other end of the Bible; I say I feel bound to believe that the teaching of the text is the teaching of the whole Bible. And when I see that a man like Cornelius, who was devout and feared God and gave alms and prayed, was not told that he had done all and would of course be saved, but was ordered to send for Peter and hear of Christ, I say again I feel bound to believe that the teaching of the text is the teaching of the whole Bible. The Word of God, fairly examined and interpreted, shuts me up to the truth laid down by Peter: no salvation, no way to heaven except by Jesus Christ.

For Junior Readers

The Boy and His Halfpenny

The boy was just six, probably younger than you are. He was going to Sabbath school and took a little coin with him. Perhaps his parents did not have much money.

He asked the teacher where the collection box was. But the teacher first asked the boy why he wanted it.

“I want to put a halfpenny into it,” answered the boy

The teacher wanted to know more about what the boy knew and how he was thinking. So he asked, “What good do you think it will do to put your money into the collection box?”

“I want to send it to the heathen.”

“Do you know who the heathen are?”

“They are folk who do not have a Bible and live far away.”

“What is the Bible?”

“The Word of God.”

“Of what use would it be to the heathen if they had it?”

“It would tell them to love God and be good.”

“Where did the Bible come from?”

“From heaven.”

“Was it written from heaven?”

“No, the prophets and good men wrote it.”

“If good men wrote it, how then is it the Word of God? How did it come from heaven?”

“Why, the Holy Ghost told them how to write it.”

“Did they see the Holy Ghost, and did He speak to them?”

“No, but He made them think it.”

The teacher had heard enough. He showed the collection box to the boy, who then dropped in his half penny.

Could you give such good answers to the teacher’s questions? Perhaps not, but you should make good use of all your opportunities to learn about the Bible and what it teaches.

Probably the boy’s parents had taught him well. You should try hard to remember all that *your* parents teach you.

For Younger Readers

Trees and Roots

There was a very strong wind yesterday. It was so strong that it blew down a tree outside the house where I am staying.

What is a tree? Is it only the leaves and the branches and the trunk – all the parts that you can see? No, there is something else very important about it – the roots that you can only see when the tree has been torn out of the ground. Roots keep a tree firmly in place and usually stop it from being blown down, even in a strong wind.

You too need to put down roots if you are not to be blown away into doing wrong. You need to put down roots into the Word of God, the Bible. What do I mean? You need to learn what it says. You need to learn its actual words. Here are two verse from the Bible (from Psalm 96) for you to learn:

Let fields rejoice, and every thing that springeth of the earth:
Then woods and every tree shall sing with gladness and with mirth
Before the Lord; because He comes, to judge the earth comes He:
He’ll judge the world with righteousness, the people faithfully.

Christ Is a Wonder

W S Plumer

Taken, with editing, from *Short Sermons for the People*. Plumer was a well-known minister in America. The text for this sermon was: "His name shall be called Wonderful . . ." (Isaiah 9:6).

Jesus Christ is the author and finisher of faith, the first and the last in salvation. So it is well that the Scriptures say much about Him. If we would know God, we must know Jesus Christ whom He has sent. No one can come to the Father but by the Son. It is important to view Christ in a right way. He is called by many names. He is said to be the Door, and the Way, the Truth and the Life. He is the Shepherd, Husband, Saviour and Mediator. The text says, His name shall be called Wonderful, or a Wonder. We may first state that the help of the Holy Spirit is necessary to let anyone rightly see the wonders in Christ's character. If the Holy Spirit does not give us spiritual eyesight, Christ will be to us as "a root out of a dry ground" (Isaiah 53:1).

1. As the Son of God, Christ has all the perfections of the Father and the Spirit. He is infinite, eternal and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth. He is present everywhere. He searches the heart. He is the Almighty. He has life in Himself. He knows all things. He is called God, the true God, the mighty God, the Lord, the King of kings. By His own power He opened blind eyes and deaf ears, healed lepers, raised the dead. The greatest wonder in the universe is God Himself. Great is the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh. Even Thomas, with all his unbelief, cried out, "My Lord and my God". Christ is Wonderful as God.

2. Christ is also a man, a real man – with a true body and a reasonable soul. Of all the works of God on earth none is more worthy of study than man, in his body, his mind and his heart. Some have thought the human body alone to be worth years of careful study. In mind, man is but a little lower than the angels. Christ was born without the taint of original sin. He was not represented by our first father. Adam came into the world without father or mother. In a sense Eve derived her existence from Adam, though she was not his daughter. Most men have both father and mother. Jesus Christ had only a mother. Christ's soul and body were as closely united as our souls and bodies are. The bond between them could be dissolved. It was dissolved in His death. He had our entire nature, sin only excepted. Jesus Christ proved that He was a man by walking, eating and sleeping, He had flesh and bones, He was glad and sorry, felt pain and pleasure, just like other men. He was the only real man that never sinned in thought, word or deed. His whole human nature and life were Wonderful.

3. In the union of Christ's two natures, the divine and human, in one person, we see enough to make it right to call Him Wonderful. The Mediator is both God and man. It is a wonder for a created spirit, a human soul, to be united to a material body to form a complete man. But in Christ the entire manhood is taken into personal and endless union with His divine nature. This union is very close; yet His natures are distinct, not mixed. Thus He, whom the heaven of heavens could not contain, dwelt in a human body. Thus the finite and the infinite, the human and the divine, the Creator and what was created, form one person for ever. Here we might stop, and admire and worship to endless ages. The Son of God stooped to take our nature with all its innocent infirmities. The Maker of all things became the Babe of Bethlehem. Both majesty and humiliation united in His birth. He, who had cradled creation in its dawn, was Himself laid in a manger. How marvellous that God with us should be found in so low a state!

4. It is wonderful that Immanuel should meet with no better reception in the world He came to bless and to save. When He was born, He was born in a stable. He was scarcely born before "the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord, and against His Anointed" (Ps 2:2). He was a sign everywhere spoken against. He came to His own, and His own received Him not. His birth troubled Herod and all Jerusalem with him. It is wonderful that the infant of a poor woman, born in a stable, should produce such dismay amongst the great. At once a deep plot to slay Him was formed in hell; it was necessary for Him to flee into Egypt.

In His life and sermons there was so much love, kindness and truth that we wonder how men could retain their venom. His doctrine and example were such that people must either give up their sins, or ignore Him, or rise up to defend their sins. He broke no law. He meddled in no strife. He spoke evil of no man. Yet, even when He was dying, His enemies did not show one pang of remorse. No one ever had so many violent opposers as Jesus. Earth and hell united their forces against Him. No one was ever tempted by the devil as He was; yet devils were subject to Him. He was a wonderful sufferer.

His public teaching was wonderful. Never man spake as this Man. He had the Spirit of God, but not by measure. He preached to men in the last stages of moral corruption. He warned against pride and error and wickedness of every kind. Earth has never seen such a preacher as Jesus: so plain, so kind, so mighty in word and deed. Though He had miraculous power, He never used it to bring evil on anyone. "When He was reviled, He reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not." By His example also He taught lessons of meekness, humility, love to God, love to man and forgiveness to enemies.

5. Christ's glory is wonderful. Angels announced His birth. At His baptism,

the Holy Ghost descended in the form of a dove, and a voice came from the excellent glory: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased". These words were repeated on the Mount of Transfiguration. When Saul of Tarsus first met Him, His brightness was above that of the sun. When John saw Him in vision, "His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and His eyes were as a flame of fire; and His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and His voice as the sound of many waters. . . . And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead," (Revelation 1:14-17). Christ's ascension to heaven and His sitting at the right hand of God are also very glorious. So shall be His coming to judge the world.

6. Christ is wonderful in His work as Mediator. In His offices of Prophet, Priest and King, there is none like Him. In them all He is perfect. He never fails. His blood takes away all sin. His teaching guides into the way of life. No one has ever ruled over men like Him. And all these wonders in Christ are growing for ever. The love and glory of Christ have never been measured, and never will be. There is no danger that we shall ever exhaust the wonders found in Christ. They will be more and more amazing as eternity rolls on.

Lessons: 1. The Bible gives us much matter for humble, godly thought and inquiry. The child of God delights to look into these great and glorious matters. Among them all none is more attractive than the person and work of Jesus Christ. Let us think much upon His name. He is Wonderful.

2. One part of true religion is holy wonder. God has shown us wonderful things so that we may wonder. Let us then "consider the wondrous works of the Lord", "talk of [His] wondrous works", and think of His "marvellous loving-kindness". Part of the activity in heaven consists in holy wonder.

3. Let us not reject the Bible because it has in it things far beyond what we can understand. Is it wise to deny the glory of the sun because we cannot tell how vast it is or how it shines? It is still more foolish to deny the glory of the Sun of righteousness, because there are things beyond our grasp in His character. Let us adoringly say, "Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory" (1 Timothy 3:16).

4. If these things are so, why does everyone not receive Christ? How can they reject Him? If anything about Him is more wonderful than anything else, it is His love and pity. True, He does not offer present ease, or favour with men. But He promises crowns and kingdoms to all who accept His salvation. Let us receive Him in all His fulness and in all His wonders. "If we be dead with Him, we shall also live with Him: if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him: if we deny Him, He also will deny us" (2 Timothy 2:11,12).

Harvest

See the corn again in ear.
How the fields and valleys smile!
Harvest now is drawing near,
To repay the farmer's toil.
Gracious Lord, secure the crop;
Satisfy the poor with food.
In Thy mercy is our hope,
We have sinned, but Thou art good.
While I view the plenteous grain
As it ripens on the stalk,
May I not instruction gain,
Helpful to my daily walk?
All this plenty of the field
Was produced from foreign seeds,
For the earth itself would yield
Only crops of useless weeds.
Though, when newly sown, it lay
Hid a while beneath the ground,
(Some might think it thrown away),
Now a large increase is found.
Though concealed, it was not lost;
Though it died, it lives again;
Eastern storms and nipping frosts,
Have opposed its growth in vain.
Let the praise be all the Lord's,
As the benefit is ours!
He, in season, still affords
Pleasant heat and gentle showers.
By His care the produce thrives,
Waving o'er the furrowed lands;
And when harvest time arrives,
Ready for the reaper stands.
Thus in barren hearts God sows
Precious seeds of heavenly joy;
Sin and hell in vain oppose;
None can grace's crop destroy;
Threatened oft, though still it blooms.
After many changes past,
Death, the reaper, when he comes,
Finds it fully ripe at last.

John Newton

Looking Around Us

“Life that Shall Never End”

Gerontology is the scientific study of old age. It is in the news again because researchers in the University of Southern California have genetically engineered yeast cells to live 10 times as long as normal. “It is the greatest extension of longevity yet achieved by researchers investigating the nature of ageing”, says a press report. One of the researchers, gerontologist Valter Hugo, stated, “If this work could ever be translated into humans, it would mean that we might one day see people living for 800 years.”

But Robin Holliday, a distinguished British gerontologist, asks, “How is it possible to make these claims? The first requirement is to ignore the huge literature on ageing research. The second is to ignore the enormous amount of information that has been obtained by the study of human age-associated disease. . . . The whole [anti-ageing] movement not only becomes science fiction; it is also breathtakingly arrogant.”

It is arrogant for another reason: it ignores the fact that since the Flood, God has limited the lifespan of human beings to 70 years, more or less. The Bible states, “The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away” (Psalm 90:10).

The anti-ageing movement seems to reject the truth that death, as the result of sin, is inevitable, and reminds one of the alchemists of old who sought to compound the elixir of life – the fabled potion which was supposed to give the drinker eternal life, or eternal youth. But we cannot escape death. The Bible asks, “What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? Shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave?” (Psalm 89:48).

But the good news is that, when physical death comes, we may live for ever in heaven. How? The answer is given by Jesus: “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die” (John 11:25,26). Or, as Jesus said to Nicodemus, “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

So the crucial question that each young person (and everyone else) should ask himself or herself is: “Do I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ?” Only believers can hope to have the blessing that Psalm 133 speaks of: “even life for evermore”.

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