

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



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Sending for a Lifeboat

Today most of Leverburgh, the village where the Editor lives, came to a standstill. Crowds gathered on the pier in the bright sunshine, with a row of parked cars stretching away for some hundreds of yards into the distance. The people were waiting for the arrival of a lifeboat which is to be stationed at this small port. From here she will be able to go to the rescue of any ship in trouble on perhaps 100 miles of the western coastline of these islands, and do so more easily than the lifeboats based at existing stations.

It might be a yacht whose engine has broken down on a windless day that will need the new lifeboat's assistance. Or it might be a fishing trawler whose gear has snagged on some object at the bottom of the sea. Or it might be some oceangoing vessel which has been blown onto rocks in a storm and is in danger of sinking. Whatever the emergency may be, the crew will rush on board the lifeboat and she will sail out at high speed to wherever the vessel in trouble may be, to give whatever help is possible.

The main reason for having lifeboats anywhere is to save lives. The RNLI (Royal National Lifeboat Institution) claims to have saved over 139 000 lives from the seas around the UK since 1824. The sea is a dangerous place, especially in stormy weather. Over the centuries, many have perished as a result of shipping disasters. It is a tragedy whenever someone is lost at sea, and every effort should be made to prevent such loss of life. So we should be thankful for the kindness of the many people who give time to organising the lifeboat service and, more importantly, for the willingness of crew members who take big risks to save the lives of others. What a relief for sailors about to abandon a sinking ship, if a lifeboat comes alongside, takes them on board and bears them away to the safety of the nearest port!

But let us consider something that is an even bigger tragedy than the loss of a life at sea. It is the loss of a soul – when someone comes to the end of a godless life and passes into a lost eternity. Yet provision has also been made for rescuing souls that are in danger of perishing for ever. And here we have to think, not about human kindness, but about the marvellous loving-kindness of God, “for 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).

We are all sinners; all our lives we have been doing what is wrong. We have done what God has told us not to do and we have not done what God has told us we must do. So we are guilty; God must punish us. There is no way in which *we* can deliver ourselves from this terrible situation. We cannot put ourselves right; we cannot get rid of the guilt of our sins. And the sad thing is that most sinners do not realise how serious their position is.

They are like sailors on a ship which has sprung a leak and is slowly sinking but they do not realise they are in any danger. Perhaps they are enjoying themselves, totally engrossed with their entertainments and paying no attention to where their ship is heading. Nor do they realise that she is sinking further and further into the water. By the time they do realise that their situation is really serious, it may be too late to do anything about it. There may be no time for a lifeboat to reach them before their ship has plunged into the depths and they themselves have slipped below the surface of the sea and are drowned. Sailors must keep an eye on where they are and what is happening around them.

So we should recognise our danger as sinners. Life is short and uncertain. We do not know how soon something may happen that will take us away from this world. We cannot afford to spend our time on worldly entertainments and neglect our souls. Unless we are rescued from our sins, death will bring us down to a lost eternity.

It should be obvious that we ought to cry for help at once. Like the sailors on a sinking ship, the sooner we seek help the better. They must at once send out an SOS for a lifeboat; we ought to pray earnestly to God for salvation from our sins.

By stationing lifeboats at various places, the RNLI has made preparation for rescuing those who are in trouble at sea. On a higher level altogether, God has made preparation for saving sinners; God “the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world” (1 John 4:14).

An African once listened to a missionary preaching in Regent's Town in Sierra Leone. Afterwards he told the missionary: “Yesterday morning when you preach, you talk about the Ten Commandments. You begin at the first, and me say to myself: ‘Me guilty!’ The second: ‘Me guilty!’ The third: ‘Me guilty!’ The Fourth: ‘Me guilty!’ The Fifth: ‘Me guilty!’

“Then you say the Sixth: ‘Thou shalt not kill’. Me say, ‘Ah, me no guilty! Me never kill some person.’

“You say, ‘I suppose plenty people live here who say, Me no guilty of that!’ Me say again in my heart: ‘Ah, me no guilty!’

“Then you say, ‘Did you never hate any person? Did you never wish that such a person, such a man or such a woman, was dead?’ You talk plenty about that, and what I feel that time I can’t tell you. I talk in my heart and say, ‘Me the same person’. My heart begin to beat; me want to cry; my heart heave so much. Me don’t know what to do.” Now he had such a sense of his sin in breaking the Sixth Commandment, by hating other people, that he exclaimed, “Me think me kill 10 people before breakfast! I never think I is so bad.”

Then the man reminded the missionary that he had talked in his sermon about the Lord Jesus and how He suffered for people’s sin. “I think”, the African went on, “I stand the same like a person that has a big stone upon his head and can’t walk, want to fall down. I have trouble too much. I hope the Lord Jesus Christ will take my sins from me. Suppose He no save me. I shall go to hell for ever.”

Here was a man who had realised that he was a sinner, that he was guilty, that he would suffer punishment for his sins in hell for ever. In other words, he knew that he was in danger; he knew that he must send for the lifeboat.

But where exactly was he spiritually? Had he sent for the lifeboat? Had he got into the lifeboat? That is – looking beyond the picture of the lifeboat – had he sincerely called on Jesus Christ to save him from his sins? Had he believed on Jesus Christ for the salvation of his soul?

That is often not an easy question to answer. In this case, perhaps the missionary asked some questions and the answers would have provided a clearer picture of the man’s spiritual state – whether he was now a believer or not. But what are people to do who have become serious about their soul and do not know whether they have really believed in Christ or not?

The first thing to be said is that they are still called to believe in Christ. He still says to them: “Look unto Me, and be ye saved . . . for I *am* God, and *there is none else*” (Isaiah 45:22). Yes, they should examine themselves as to whether they act, speak and think like God’s children. Do they want to live to God’s glory? Do they hunger and thirst after righteousness, longing to live a godly life? Do they want to see other people converted, even to the extent that the whole earth would be filled with God’s glory?

It is highly important to be able to answer these questions. Yet it is even more important for us to focus on our need to *trust* in Christ as the One who died for sinners and rose again, the One who is exalted “to *give* repentance . . . and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31). It is dangerous to look at ourselves in the hope of finding something to bring before God in order to please Him. We will never succeed in finding that. We must receive salvation and everything connected with it *from Christ alone*. He gives it freely.

Abraham – The Friend of God

3. God's Friends Are Obedient and Separate

Rev Neil M Ross

This series of articles is based on a paper given at a Youth Conference, and is intended to highlight some lessons to be learned from Abraham's life. In part 2, last month, we noted that faith in Christ is the basis of friendship with God.

When someone believes in Christ, he is at the same time *given a view of the glory of God*. We must all have this if we are to be friends of God – a lesson we would do well to learn.

Abraham received a view of the glory of God. In Acts 7:2 we read, "The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia". He was given, we believe, such a view of the glory of "the God of glory", as the God of salvation, that his soul was saved and his life changed. Not only was he called to leave a certain place, Ur in Mesopotamia, but he was also called to believe in God and to worship and serve Him. That call had a powerful effect upon him – it was made effectual to him. In other words, he experienced what we often describe as "effectual calling" – that is, he was convinced of his sin; God enlightened him about salvation; he believed in the Messiah, Jesus Christ, who was yet to come. Thus he became the friend of God.

When today's believers were effectually called they also got a view of the glory of God as the God of salvation. Paul puts it this way to the believers in Corinth: "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6), that is, in or through the person and work of Jesus Christ. We cannot really have a saving view of the glory of God except through Jesus Christ. It was such a view of God's glory that, for example, the "Highland kitchen-maid" got in answer to her prayer (taught her by the respected minister, Hector MacPhail of Resolis): "Lord, show me Thyself". And so, from that day, her prayer was answered; she was now a friend of God.

What is it to see the glory of God? You will remember that Moses prayed to God: "I beseech Thee, shew me Thy glory". God answered his prayer by saying, "I will make all My goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee" (Exodus 33:18,19); and then later by passing before him and proclaiming to him: "The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth" (Exodus 34:6).

Another lesson is that *obedience to God is essential* if we are to be the

friends of God. All His friends obey Him; so we must learn to imitate Abraham's obedience. Abraham certainly showed he was the friend of God by doing exactly what God required of him. At the call of God, and without hesitating, he left his country and relatives to go to a land which he did not yet know. "So Abram departed," we read, "as the Lord had spoken unto him" (Gen 12:1,4), or, as it is written in Hebrews 11, "Abraham . . . obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went". He obeyed the call to leave behind so much that had been dear to him and he became "a stranger and pilgrim in the earth". Especially, he obeyed the call to worship and serve the living God and to cease being an ungodly idolater.

The gospel calls us to forsake sin, separate from the world and set our hearts on heaven, the "better country". Have we obeyed? The gospel is not only to be heard as good news; it is also to be *obeyed*. When Christ will come to judge the world, He will deal especially with those who "obey not the gospel" (2 Thessalonians 1:8).

The basic obedience we must give to the gospel is to repent of our sins and believe in Christ. In Mark 1:15, we find Jesus commanding the people: "Repent ye, and believe the gospel". Also, in Matthew 4:17, we read, "Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand". And He solemnly warned, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3). Also in John 12:36 Jesus, as the light of the world, says, "While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light". And He gives the associated warning: "If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:24). I say again, the gospel is to be *obeyed*. The Bible is clear: God "commandeth all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30); and "this is His commandment, That we should believe on the name of His Son, Jesus Christ" (1 John 3:23).

A further lesson is that the friend of God is *separate from the world*. In leaving Ur, Abraham separated himself from the ungodliness of the city and the heathen society there. Like the people of Mesopotamia, the members of Abraham's family were ungodly – instead of worshipping the true God they worshipped false gods, as Joshua told the Israelites: "Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods" (Joshua 24:2). Whatever indistinct knowledge of God Abraham may have had, most commentators conclude that he was involved in the idolatrous worship and the other ungodliness of the people. But God appeared to him, showed him His glory, and commanded him to leave Ur, saying, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall show thee" (Acts 7:3). And so he separated from them.

If we are to be the friends of God, we must separate from ungodly companions, pleasures and practices; we must go along with the godly as they journey to heaven. You may think that it is just too difficult to leave behind some ungodly people and practices.

But you will agree, I am sure, that it would not have been easy for Ruth to leave Moab, to turn her back on her native land and all that was dear to her there. Yet she was convinced that she had to leave behind the gods of Moab and its ungodly people. And so she purposefully went along with godly Naomi, saying, "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God" (Ruth 1:16). The call of the gospel has this demand in it: "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you" (2 Corinthians 6:17). It is as if God says, I will receive you as My friends. Is that not the greatest privilege a sinner could have?

The Old Ploughman

1. "I'm in a New World"

George Medway was born in 1766 in a small cottage just outside a Shropshire village. He always did an honest day's work on the farm where he worked. As a young man he was noted for his strength and for how fast he could run. But he had no religion, and he spent every Sabbath evening in the Hare and Hound public house. At last he used to boast that he had not missed his weekly visit there for over 50 years. But even if had he gone to the church in his village, it is not likely he would have learned much. The minister had just one sermon for each of the 52 Sabbaths in the year and one for a few special occasions. So each year, Sabbath by Sabbath, he used to read through these "dry and heartless essays". It was little wonder that the number of people coming to church became smaller and smaller.

When George reached the age of 71 he was becoming too feeble to go on working as a ploughman. So he moved away to live with his son, who ran a pub in a town some distance away. At first he drank far too much; he could get the ale for nothing and he had little else to do in a town where he knew nobody. But his son soon put a limit on the ale he allowed his father to drink. This was an act of kindness to his father, but did he show the same humanity to his customers?

Now George often wandered about alone and he would stop to gaze, with a rather bored look, on anything which caught a little of his attention. One

day he followed a little path which led into a garden. Then he noticed a cottage at the end of the path and a man standing at the door. This was godly old John Dean, who invited George to come inside and sit down. George talked on and on about his earlier days back in his old village. He was enjoying himself and John let him speak, expecting eventually to have an opportunity to say something about a more important subject.

At last, George ran out of things to say and John began to speak about the teachings of the Bible. But he discovered that George knew absolutely nothing about spiritual things; he could not understand anything that he was being told. When John mentioned about Christ's crucifixion, George just remarked that he thought "it was too bad to serve Him so; they wouldn't do so in Shropshire".

As George left the cottage, John invited him to come back for an evening, "and then we have can have a good long chat". Although George seemed to be unable to understand anything about the Bible, John knew that there is a power connected with its truths. Mrs Dean too was godly and, after George had left, John told her: "We must pray to the Lord for the poor old man, and who can tell but faith and prayer may prevail and we may live to see him divinely quickened into newness of life?"

She answered hopefully: "It will be a grand thing. And what a striking proof, if it should take place, of the mighty power of the Lord Jesus Christ, who can subdue all things to Himself!"

The next evening George returned to the Deans' cottage, wearing his best clothes. No doubt he was glad to have the company of people who would take an interest in him and listened to what he had to say. And for some time he talked on and on about the events of his earlier life. Then he had nothing more to say, and he listened in silence as John and his wife spoke to him about Jesus Christ and the great salvation He has provided. They tried too to make him see that he was a sinner who needed the Saviour. But it seemed as if everything they said echoed back to them without making the least impression on him. They were disappointed but they did not despair because they knew that the Holy Spirit was able to do what they were completely powerless to bring about.

As George was leaving the cottage, John expressed the wish that he would come the next Sabbath morning and go somewhere with him. At once George promised to come, thinking it would be for a walk in the country. The Sabbath came, and George appeared at the appointed time. As they set off, George asked about where they were going.

John explained that he was not going into the country, but to church, "and I suppose you will have no objection to going with me".

“As for that,” George answered, “I shan’t tell what to do, for I never went to one but when I was married, nearly 50 years ago.”

“You will have nothing to do but sit still and hold your tongue, and just listen to what the minister says.”

“Part of that, I think, is easy enough, as I shall soon be off to sleep, if I am to sit still and do nothing.”

The Lord’s Supper was to be observed that morning, so the minister preached about why Christ died. He was interested to see how George was reacting; he had noticed George for the first time ever as he walked up the aisle behind John Dean. George was sitting perfectly still with his hands clutching the bookboard in front of him. His mouth was wide open, as he looked intensely at the minister. Obviously he was now taking in what was being said, and the Holy Spirit was blessing the truth to his soul.

He walked away from the church in silence. At last he said, “I’m in a new world. Yes, I be in a new world.” He repeated this again and again as they walked along and he seemed unable to take in anything that John said to him.

When he reached his son’s house, George found him and some of the neighbours sitting in the pub. They were rather alarmed when he told them: “I’ve been and heard a man who has taken me into a new world. You must all go with me and Mr Dean tonight. It is a wonderful world.”

God’s Providence

1. “Preserving and Governing All His Creatures”

Rev W A Weale

This is the first part of a paper, given at this year’s Youth Conference. Its full title was: “God’s Providence and Our Interpretation of It”. The paper makes four main points: (1) God’s works of providence are ongoing; (2) They are extensive; (3) As to their nature, they are holy, wise and powerful; (4) As to our interpretation of them, that they are mysterious.

God’s providence is a difficult subject. There is good reason for speaking about “the mystery of providence”. The question that we must address at the outset of this study is: What do we mean by God’s providence? John J Murray’s booklet, *Behind a Frowning Providence*, is helpful here. He explains, “When we break [the word] down into parts, the meaning becomes clear. It comes from the Latin *video*, to see, and *pro*, before, meaning *to see beforehand*. In our lives we plan beforehand but we do not see what is going to happen. God has planned everything for His creation and, because He is the sovereign God, everything will come to pass as He has purposed it.

Providence is that marvellous working of God by which all the events and happenings in His universe accomplish the purpose He has in mind."

Many other helpful definitions have been given. For example, the Puritan Thomas Watson, in *A Body of Divinity*, defines providence as "God's ordering all issues and events of things after the counsel of His will, to His own glory". This he distinguishes from the decrees of God. "God's decree", says Watson, "ordains things that shall fall out; God's providence orders them". John Flavel, whose book, *The Mystery of Providence*, is known to many of us, asks in his introduction: "What are the works of providence but the execution of God's decree and the fulfilling of His Word?". More recently, Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones defines God's providence as "that continual exercise of the divine energy whereby the Creator upholds all His creatures in operation, in all that transpires in this world, and directs all things to their appointed end".

Perhaps the simplest and most compact definition of God's providence is the one given in the *Shorter Catechism*: "God's works of providence are His most holy, wise and powerful, preserving and governing all His creatures and all their actions". In the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, as in the *Shorter Catechism*, the doctrine of providence follows on from that of creation, and this is natural. Creation was God bringing everything into being. In the opening chapter of Genesis we have an account of the six days of Creation; then Chapter 2 begins: "Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made."

So, after six days, on the clear testimony of Scripture, the work of creation was complete. We conclude that the idea of a progressive creation, as found in pantheism (the belief that God is part of His own creation), as well as in Islamic thought, is foreign to the truth of God's Word. So also is the teaching of the Deist, who claims that after God created the universe He set it in motion just as one would wind up a clock; thus all that takes place, they claim, is simply the random power of nature.

1. God's works of providence are ongoing. They have been so now for over 6000 years, ever since the creation of the world. "My Father", Jesus said, "worketh hitherto and I work." Bearing in mind the *Shorter Catechism* definition, two elements must be noted here:

(1) *Preservation* (keeping in being). Many portions of Scripture bear this out: The Lord is "upholding all things by the word of His power" (Hebrews 1:3). As the Lord Jesus told His disciples: not a sparrow falls to the ground "without your Father" (Matthew 10:29). In God "we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). "The Lord maketh the hinds to calf" (Psalm 29:9). And, as David sings, "the eyes of all wait upon Thee; and Thou givest them

their meat in due season” (Psalm 145:15). From those quotations – and many more could be given – it is clear that the whole universe, which is in constant motion, is under the care and keeping of God. We may also note here that, as well as the Lord preserving them in being, He also restrains His people from sinning. “He keepeth the feet of His saints.”

(2) *Government*: This word goes back to the Latin word for *helmsman*; it implies that God is at the helm of the universe. In Psalm 103:19 we are told: “The Lord hath prepared His throne in the heavens; and His kingdom ruleth over all”. Then again, God sets restraining bounds to the wrath of man (Psalm 76:10).

One way that we should recognise the government of God is in the perfect timing of events. John Flavel, quoted already, refers to this: “We find a multitude of providences so timed to a minute that, had they occurred just a little sooner or later, they had mattered little in comparison with what now they do. Certainly, it cannot be chance, but counsel, that so exactly works in time. . . . The angel calls to Abraham, and shows him another sacrifice just when his hand was giving the fatal stroke to Isaac (Genesis 22:10-11). A well of water is shown to Hagar just when she had left the child, as not able to see its death (Genesis 21:16,19). Rabshakeh meets with a blasting providence, hears a rumour that frustrated his purpose, just when ready to make an assault upon Jerusalem (Isaiah 37:8).”

This perfect timing was not confined to Bible times but is seen throughout history. It was no coincidence that a storm arose in the summer of 1588, at the very time that the Spanish Armada threatened England; the storm destroyed the fleet of King Philip II of Spain, who was intent on restoring Roman Catholicism, with all its poisonous doctrines, to full authority in the land. It was no coincidence either that a great calm settled over the English Channel for several days in May 1940, so that 335 000 men of the British Army could be safely evacuated from Dunkirk. Indeed, if God's children observe their own lives carefully, they too will not fail to see this marvellous timing of events.

This marvellous timing of God's providence is also illustrated in an incident in the life of John Newton when he was tide-surveyor at Liverpool. One day some business delayed him, and he came to his boat much later than usual. This surprised those who had noticed how punctual he usually was. He went out in his boat as usual to inspect a ship, but the ship blew up just before he reached it. It appears that, if he had left the shore a few minutes sooner, he must have perished with the rest of those on board the ship. So God's works of providence are ongoing. He is constantly, and with perfect timing and precision, preserving and governing His Creation.

Through the Alphabet with the Bible

Here are five verses from the Bible containing the word:

Come

Ho, every one that thirsteth, *come* ye to the waters, and he that hath no money: come ye, buy and eat; yea, *come*, buy wine and milk without money and without price (Isaiah 55:1).

Precept: O children, hither do ye *come*,
and unto me give ear;
I shall you teach to understand
how ye the Lord should fear (Psalm 34:11).

Promise: All that the Father giveth Me shall *come* to Me; and him that *cometh* to Me I will in no wise cast out (John 6:37).

Prayer: Oh that I knew where I might find Him! that I might *come* even to His seat! (Job 23:3)

Encouragement: Wherefore [Jesus] is able also to save them to the uttermost that *come* unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them (Hebrews 7:25). S

For Junior Readers

The Torn Testament

Jacques and his wife Jeanne lived together in a little cottage in France. One day a colporteur, a man selling religious books and Bibles, made his way through the forest and stopped at their front door. Jeanne was in alone. Jacques was out at work, burning wood to make charcoal.

The colporteur offered to sell Jeanne a New Testament for 50 centimes. She looked at the nice little book for some time; it probably seemed a lot of money to her, and she was afraid of what Jacques might say. But, in the end, she paid the 50 centimes to the colporteur, and the book was hers.

Soon Jacques came home from work, sat down and had something to eat. Then, though she was fearful of what might happen, Jeanne showed Jacques the book she had bought. Jacques was tired and cross and gave her a row for spending his money in this way.

“But”, she told him, “the money is not all yours, Jacques.” Jeanne had brought some money when they married; so she claimed now that the 50 centimes belonged to her as much as they did to Jacques.

Jack flew into a rage and shouted, “Give me the book”. He grabbed it from her hands and told her: “The money was half yours and half mine, you

say. Very well, the book is the same." So he opened the book roughly and tore it in two. He threw one part to Jeanne and kept the other himself.

Several days later he was sitting in the forest, perhaps eating his lunch. He suddenly remembered the torn book and decided to look at it. He had ripped the book apart in the middle of Luke's Gospel. So his part of the New Testament began in Luke 15. He started to read at the top of the first page, about the Prodigal Son: ". . . and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants".

The story was interesting, very interesting. He read on to the end. There were lots of questions in his mind: "What had he done, the poor lost son? Why was he away from home? Where had he been? What made him return? "I wish I had the beginning of the story", he said to himself. He could easily have found out by asking Jeanne, but his pride kept him from doing so.

When Jeanne had some time to spare from her housework now, she used to pick up her part of the New Testament. She seems to have found reading difficult, but she kept on and she began to enjoy what she was reading. At last she finished her part of the book. She had reached the story of the prodigal son: his sin, his journey, his misery, and the wonderful change in his thoughts. Her part of the book came to an end with the words: "And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father."

Jeanne too had questions in her mind: What happened next? Did the father welcome him? She cried because she did not know the answers. And she was afraid to ask Jacques.

One day he came home even more weary than usual, perhaps because it was raining very heavily. He sat down and ate his soup and bread as usual. Then suddenly he asked, "Jeanne, you remember the book I tore in two?"

"O yes", Jeanne answered, half afraid of what would come next.

"My part had in it a wonderful story," Jacques told her, "but only the end of it. I cannot rest until I know the beginning of it. Bring me your piece."

"O Jacques, how wonderful!"

"Why?"

"The same story is always in my mind, only I lack the ending. Did the father receive that wilful son?"

"He did. But what was it that separated them?"

Jeanne brought her part of the New Testament and knelt down beside Jacques' chair. Together they read the whole parable of the prodigal son. They both found the answers to all their questions. Jacques discovered that

the son left home because he wanted to live just as he pleased. And Jeanne found out that, when the wilful son returned home, the father gave him a very warm welcome.

And Jacques and Jeanne found out more. Night after night they read the Testament together by the light of the fire after eating their soup and bread. The Holy Spirit worked in their hearts so that they understood the spiritual meaning of the parable. They found out that they were sinners. Like the prodigal son away from his father, they were sinners away from God. They were made willing to return to God. And they found that, just as the father was willing to welcome the Prodigal Son, so God was willing to receive Jacques and Jeanne as they came to Him by faith.

For Younger Readers

When the Chair Broke

Long ago a man called William Dickins was working high up above the ground. He was repairing the very tall steeple of a church. As he worked, he was sitting on a kind of chair that was tied to the steeple.

Suddenly William's chair broke and there was nothing to stop him from falling all the way down to the ground. But as he fell, he knocked against two stones which formed part of the church. He sent them tumbling down to the ground. But when he hit them he broke his leg and his foot. And still he kept falling.

His brother Daniel was with him at the church. Daniel heard William cry out as he fell: "Lord, have mercy upon me". William was obviously very frightened. He needed help from the only one who could help him, and that was God.

Did God help William? Yes, He did. Of course, William hurt himself badly, but surprisingly he was not killed. Indeed, William lived till he was 73 years old.

What happened then? I do not know. But what I do know is that he went either to heaven or to hell. And I know something else: if William trusted in Christ Jesus, he went to heaven.

I hope he went on to pray like the man Jesus speaks about in Luke 18:13. This was the man who said, "God be merciful to me a sinner". It is a good prayer for you to use too.

Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ

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: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31).

The Bible says much about faith. The lack of it is the great sin of every age. If someone truly believes, he is sure to have right feelings and to live as God commands. Without faith it is impossible to please God.

True faith believes all God's Word, but it refers chiefly to Jesus Christ. The reason is that God sets forth Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the only Saviour of lost men. Many texts in the Bible speak of faith in the Lord Jesus as necessary to salvation, and making eternal life sure. True, living faith in Christ is the gift of God. It is the fruit of the Spirit. It is a saving grace. He who accepts the Lord Jesus is accepted by God.

1. What does it mean to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ?

(1.) Sometimes God explains faith to us by our sense of *feeling*. So Paul at Mars' Hill said to the Athenians "that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him" (Acts 17:27). People are blind; like poor Bartimeus they should grope their way along – by faith feeling their way to the blessed Saviour.

(2.) Sometimes the Scriptures explain faith by our sense of *taste*. Thus David says, "O taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man that trusteth in Him" (Psalm 34:8). There is nothing like experience. A taste of the good things of God and of the precious things of salvation will do more to cure the love of sin than all the proud reasonings of men.

(3.) Sometimes faith is explained by the sense of *hearing*. Thus God says, "Incline your ear, and come unto Me: hear, and your soul shall live" (Isaiah 55:3). Our Lord says of Himself, as the Good Shepherd, "The sheep hear His voice". There is great fitness in speaking about faith like this, for the Word of God calls to men and, if they do not hear, they cannot live. They who close their ears against the calls of mercy shut themselves out from salvation. On the other hand, those who hear the voice of God with a glad heart and obey it with a willing mind shall be saved.

(4.) One of the oldest ways of explaining faith in Christ is by the sense of *sight*. This was probably taken from looking to the brazen serpent which Moses lifted up on a pole. He who was bitten by the fiery serpent might look to it and live. Christ says that this serpent was a type of Himself: "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). This way of explaining faith is found in both the Old and New Testaments. Long before Christ came, He said, "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else" (Isaiah 45:22). So when Paul instructs us how to win the heavenly race, he tells us to "lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us . . . looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:1,2). The child looks to his father for help. The sick man looks to the physician to be cured. Yet father and physician may both fail to do us any good. But he who looks to Jesus shall be saved.

(5.) Sometimes faith is said to be a *receiving* of Christ (John 1:12). Thus when Christ went to Jericho and found Zaccheus in the sycamore tree, He said to him, "Today I must abide at thy house. And he made haste, and came down, and received Him joyfully." His outward conduct corresponded to his inward feeling. His heart led him to welcome Christ. But the mass of Christ's nation treated Him sinfully: when He came to His own, they did not receive Him. We must have such a state of mind that, if the Lord Jesus Christ was on earth, waiting at our door, we would gladly take Him in.

(6.) At least once in Scripture, faith is explained by the *kiss* of love: "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him" (Psalm 2:12). In Eastern countries, when people have quarrelled, and friends come and settle the difficulties, the parties show they accept the terms by kissing each other. So we poor sinners have been at war with the Lamb. We have not treated Him as we should have done. He tells us to give up our hatred, and to prove it by giving Him the kiss of love.

(7.) When Jesus Christ was on earth, and people wanted anything from Him, they used to come to Him for it. He often invited all sorts of people: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). Faith in Christ has often been explained by this act of *coming*. If, after someone had truly believed, the Saviour was in the world anywhere near him, he would come to Him for life and salvation.

So faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is a hearty persuasion that He is the Son of God, the Saviour of men, the only hope of lost sinners, and one who is in every way fit to take our souls into His hands, and keep us from the evil in the world. The seat of faith is not in the brain, but in the heart. Paul says, "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness". In genuine faith the mind does indeed assent to the truth, but the heart consents to it. When we truly believe in Jesus, we heartily rely on Him, and on Him alone, for salvation.

2. He who thus receives Christ, who thus believes on Him, shall be saved. The Scriptures say so in many places. "Abraham believed God, and it was

counted to Him for righteousness.” “The just shall live by faith.” It is only by faith that we can become members of God’s family. “Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.” All who thus receive the Saviour have been born again. “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.” Such a faith will purify the heart, cure the love of sin, and destroy the habit of sinning. This is a great work to accomplish in fallen men.

Faith in Christ warms up the cold heart. It works by love. It takes away the natural hatred to holy things. It makes Christ precious to the soul, so that millions have gladly died for Him. It also quenches all the fiery darts of the wicked one. When temptations fall thick and fast on someone who has true faith, they have no power to hurt him. By faith also we gain the victory over the world. It shows us how vain everything merely earthly is. It shows us the glories of the unseen world – the only glories worth setting our hearts on.

He who believes shall be saved from the guilt of sin. He takes Christ as his great sacrifice for sin, as his Surety to answer for him to God. He shall also be saved from the power of sin. Faith crucifies the flesh with its affections and lusts. Every day it puts sin to death. And he shall be saved from misery. It is only by faith that we enter into rest. Death shall have no power to destroy anyone who relies on Jesus. He that believes shall never die – never die as the wicked die. To him death has no sting. Over him the grave gains no victory. Heaven is his house not made with hands.

The reason for all this is that Christ Jesus is, to everyone who believes in Him, “as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land” (Isaiah 32:2). To the child of God, Christ is everything. His blood is the fountain where the soul washes and is clean. He is the chief Cornerstone on which all good hopes for eternity are built. He is the only Priest whose offering ever really took away sin. He is the only King who can subdue our iniquities under us. If He teaches us, we cannot miss heaven. If He is our Guide, we shall make no fatal mistakes. If He is our Light, the darkest dungeon will not be gloomy. If He is our Shepherd, we shall not want. If He is our Husband, we shall not be desolate.

Will you not believe in the Lord Jesus? Come to Him, confessing that you deserve death, that you deserve no good thing. Take Him at His Word. Look to Him alone. Rely on Him alone. Let Him be all your salvation and all your desire. If Satan tempts you to forsake Christ, cling to Him more closely. If wicked men laugh at you, remember a day is coming when God will hold them in derision. Fight on. Fight bravely. Be strong in the Lord. Earnestly ask Him to increase your faith. Even a weak faith shall save the soul; but the stronger faith is the better. “Lord, I believe; help Thou my unbelief.”

Scripture and Catechism Exercises 2011-12

Names for Exercise 2

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Looking Around Us

Iceberg, the White Killer Whale

Imagine the surprise of a group of scientists, at sea off Russia studying social interaction among whales, when they spotted the dorsal fin of a whale which was not black but white. The fin stood six feet above the surface of the water and belonged to a 22-foot-long whale. They called the whale Iceberg (because of its white fin standing above the water), and they were able to watch it for some considerable time as it swam with the pod of fish-eating whales.

Yes, Iceberg is a white, male killer whale (possibly an albino) about 16 years old. It appears to be the same white whale that was spotted by others in 2000 and 2008, and therefore is probably the only white whale in the world. The scientists report that, although Iceberg is a different colour to his companions in the pod, this does not have a negative effect on him. In fact, they say, he is a beautiful, healthy, robust, thriving animal.

Many people think that to be different from others by living as a Christian is something very negative. They believe that to stand out from others by being a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is unhealthy, and that the person who lives such a life cannot really thrive and be successful.

But the Bible shows us that to be different from worldly people, by living the Christian life, is a good thing even when one meets with difficulties. Yes, we have to be in the company of worldly people (in studying or at work, for example), just as Iceberg goes along with the rest of the pod as it hunts for fish. But we must not be “of the world”. The Bible says, “Be not conformed to this world” (Romans 12:2). Let us not be ashamed to be different.

Another thing to remember is that to be different, by living a godly life, is the real way to thrive and be happy. The Bible says, “Godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Timothy 6:6), and, “Godliness is profitable” (1 Timothy 4:8). Let us not forget the words of the Lord Jesus, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33).

Is Iceberg the only white killer whale in the world? Probably! Even although you were the only Christian in the world, it would better to be alone than to be one of the many unbelieving people who reject Christ. In any case, however much a Christian may feel alone because he is different, he never is alone. Not only does he have the company of fellow Christians sometimes, but he always has Christ as his Friend, who says to him, “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:20). *NMR*

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