

# The Young People's Magazine

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

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*“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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## The Young People's Magazine

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# The Young People's Magazine

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## A Huge Difference

After a year of wandering through the wilderness, the Children of Israel were at last approaching the promised land. So God told Moses to send out 12 men as spies to search out the land of Canaan. They were to find out about the people who lived there; were they “strong or weak, few or many”? Did they live in tents or did they have fortresses? Was the land good or bad, and did trees grow there?

The spies followed the instructions they were given. They spent 40 days exploring the land. In their report they all agreed that it was a very fertile land and brought back a huge bunch of grapes to prove it. Ten of the men emphasised how big the people in Canaan were; indeed some of them were giants. So these spies said, no doubt in despairing tones, “We were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight”. They also stressed that the cities in Canaan had strong walls around them. These men were quite sure that to invade the land would turn out to be a complete disaster, even although God had *promised* them the land as a very suitable place to live in. They reported, “We be not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we”.

There were two other men in the party: Joshua and Caleb. They came to a completely different conclusion. They assured Moses and the people that it was perfectly possible to take possession of the land; they said, “Let us go up at once to possess it, for we are well able to overcome it”.

What made the difference? Everybody went to the same places; they all saw the same things; they probably had much the same outlook on life – except for one thing. Caleb and Joshua trusted in God; the other 10 men did not. That made a huge difference. Caleb and Joshua knew God would do everything He had promised. He had said He would bring the Israelites into the promised land; so, Caleb and Joshua fully believed, He *would* bring them in. They had no doubt about it. Whatever the difficulties – and obviously they saw that there were many difficulties – they were convinced that their God was fully able to do what He had promised, and that He would.

Today most people do not take God seriously. Many believe that He does

not exist at all; many others do not much care whether He exists or not. So they do not trouble to worship Him; they never go to church; they never read the Bible; they never pray to Him; they never seek to glorify Him in their lives. But God is altogether worthy of being worshipped; He is so great, so full of majesty, so glorious, that we should always be seeking to glorify Him in every possible way.

All 12 of the spies, I am sure, assumed that God existed, but most of them did not allow that fact to influence their thinking. They knew what Moses had told them about God and His power and glory; they had seen the evidence of His power in the miracles He had done in Egypt. But none of that made any real difference when they were thinking about whether Israel should invade Canaan or not. When they saw the giants in Canaan, they were too much impressed by *their* strength, and they did not think about God's strength; they did not have faith to see this or anything else that was beyond the reach of human eyesight.

Joshua and Caleb, on the other hand, were deeply influenced in their thinking by the fact that there is a God. They saw something beyond what the other men saw; by faith they saw God as He had revealed Himself – as One who is infinite in His power and who can be trusted in all that He says. So they believed His promises; they understood that He is greater than the most powerful of human armies; they trusted Him to bring them into Canaan just as He had promised.

Presumably, if you are reading this Magazine, you believe that there is a God, and that He is what the Bible says He is. But how much does that influence your thinking? How much does it influence the way you view life in general? Do you act on the principle that your main purpose in life is to glorify God. Do you bear in mind that you should try to please Him in everything you do? Indeed does this important point about glorifying God influence how you behave? Or do you live as if you are free to act in any way that suits yourself, without taking any other being into account – even God?

God created us. He did so for a purpose: so that He would be glorified in our lives. But Adam and Eve fell from the state in which they were created; they fell into a state of sin and misery. And so every human being is a fallen, sinful creature. If we have any concern to glorify God in our lives – to do His will, to keep from sin – we will soon realise that we need a complete change. A little tinkering with the details of our outward life is not enough; to get rid of a few sins will leave plenty others still very active. To do so will do nothing to improve our thoughts, our attitudes and our desires; it will not bring us to love God or to long that He would be glorified in everything we do. What we need is a new heart – which is the work of God the Holy Spirit.

We need to recognise that, without God's work in our hearts, we will never live life properly; we will go on in sin, and the terrible end of it all will be eternal punishment in hell.

How do we look at sin? Do we see that some of the things we do are harmful to others? Or do we also see them, and much more seriously, as offensive to God? Do we see that the only way we can escape the punishment that sin deserves is to trust in Christ Jesus. He took the punishment of sin upon Himself; He died instead of sinners. He calls on us to believe in Him; He says, "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).

How do we make decisions? Do we, like the 10 spies, just look at the facts, as we see them, and decide what to do? Or do we, like Caleb and Joshua, not only look at the facts but remember God? I am sure that they both prayed to God, not only for His care as they went about Canaan, but also that He would direct them as they considered what they saw.

So we today should always be asking God to direct us whenever we have decisions to make. If you have to decide what subjects to study at school or college or university, you should ask God to guide your thinking and lead you to the best decision. You know only a few things about the future, and even about the present; He knows it all far better than you do. Indeed He knows everything, even about the unseen future. So you should ask Him to help you decide. If you have to make up your mind what jobs to apply for – another very important matter, which may affect the rest of your life – ask God to bless you as you try to decide. Ask Him to guide you to the best decision – especially in these days when so many difficulties arise in various types of employment, when you may be expected to do what is sinful. Remember too to commit every such difficulty to God in prayer.

Augustine was a noted minister in the Church in North Africa in the early 400s. He spoke about someone most people thought of as a fool. But Augustine felt that this man was truly godly because he could see two signs of God's grace in him. One was the serious way he listened to any sermon about Christ; the other was the hatred he showed to sin. His power to think about the things of this world was very limited, but Augustine believed that God had revealed Himself to this man and changed his heart; so he had much more power to think about God than about the ordinary things of this life. This was why the man enjoyed listening to sermons about Christ and why he hated sin. It is a great blessing to have the power to think properly about the things of this world; it is far more important to be able to think properly about sin and salvation and the other things of God. May we, like Caleb and Joshua, have that sense of what is really important in life!

# The Apostle John's Life and Ministry

## 1. His Background

*Rev G G Hutton*

This is the first part of a paper given at this year's Youth Conference.

By comparing the information found in Mark 1:19,20 with what we have in Matthew 27:56 and Mark 15:40,41, we know that the Apostle John was the son of Zebedee and Salome. Some biblical scholars conclude, on the basis of these details, that Salome was the sister of Jesus' mother, and so John was actually related to Jesus by family ties.

One of the early Church Fathers (called Theophylact) asserts that Joseph, before the birth of Jesus, "had seven children by a former wife, four sons and three daughters, Martha, Esther and Salome, whose son John was; therefore Salome was reckoned our Lord's sister, and John was his nephew." One New Testament commentator remarks: "If this was the case it may explain the reason why James and John sought and expected the first places in His kingdom (Matthew 20:20,21). These may also possibly be the persons who were called our Lord's 'brethren' and 'sisters' (Matthew 13:55,56). This may also explain the reason why our Saviour committed His mother to the care of John on the cross (John 19:27)." Such a family relationship, for which there appears to be some reasonable evidence, would probably quite naturally influence Jesus' personal affection for John.

Before Jesus called him to be a disciple, John was a fisherman – an occupation not usually considered, even in his generation, to be for educated men. But John displays great ability in writing, as well as a strength of mind which is rarely seen.

So some Bible critics assert that John, the fisherman, could not have written the parts of the New Testament which bear his name. It is suggested that he would not have been educated enough nor could he have had the writing skills necessary to write the portions of the New Testament which we believe he wrote. They claim that the profound statement at the beginning of John's Gospel, for example, is evidence of an author well versed in Greek learning and philosophy. This is something a Galilean fisherman, it is supposed, would simply not possess. On the other hand, there are others who, although they credit John with writing the Fourth Gospel, are somewhat critical of his style as a Greek writer; they argue that its simplicity and unpolished plainness is evidence of an unlearned author.

We can, of course, respond to all the critics that John was no ordinary writer, but one divinely inspired to write, and thus he would have had no

difficulty whatever – what he wrote was by divine revelation and did not depend on his natural abilities or on what he had learned. John received the teaching of the Holy Spirit, which the Saviour promised to all His Apostles: “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26). Also, “When He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak: and He will show you things to come. He shall glorify Me: for He shall receive of Mine, and shall show it unto you. All things that the Father hath are Mine: therefore said I, that He shall take of Mine, and shall show it unto you” (John 16:13-15).

We believe that John, in fulfilment of the Saviour's promise, had all the essential spiritual gifts and graces he needed to write Scripture. But I think, when we take into consideration his circumstances, as they are implied in the Gospels, we have some evidence for suggesting that he very probably had more advantages for learning than the average man of his generation, perhaps even of most.

John's father was a fisherman of Galilee, and both he and his brother James worked with their father in that business. The fact that both brothers left their father at once, at Jesus call, to continue the work with “the hired servants” (Mark 1:20) suggests a reasonable degree of prosperity in the family business. This evident prosperity would have given them some social standing in the community, and may well have given the sons of Zebedee opportunities for learning which were not available to others. If this was the case, it would in God's providence have helped to prepare John's mind for his future ministry of writing. And John's mother was one of the group of women who followed Jesus, supporting Him from their means; they were sufficiently well off to be able to buy spices for the Saviour's burial. This, we suggest, is further evidence of this disciple's comfortable circumstances.

When we read that John could easily get into the place and company where Jesus was taken for judgement after His arrest, while Simon Peter could not, it suggests that John's social standing was probably above average. It was clearly somewhat above Peter's. The High Priest, who was no ordinary member of society, obviously knew John, and this may testify to his standing within his own community and particularly within the religious community. We read, “That disciple [John] was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest. But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter” (John 18:15,16).

The evidence points to a disciple who was more than a common fisherman without education.

We may also note that Jesus gave both John and his brother James the surname “Boanerges”, meaning, “The sons of thunder” (Mark 3:17). One writer states that it is usually thought that this name expresses “their earnestness, zeal, and enthusiasm”. It is often true – while one could not always argue in this way – that this type of personality helps the pursuit of learning. So we are happy, especially when all his circumstances are taken into account, to accept that it was John the fisherman who wrote portions of our New Testament.

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## The Man Whose Teacher Was Jesus

One day, an old, white-haired man made his way to a Mission station in Bangkok, in Thailand. Although he was blind in one eye, he had walked for five days from his home to reach the Mission. He had never before seen a Christian missionary but, in various ways, he had obtained some Christian books. The books were not in perfect condition; they had been thrown away and some of them were partly torn. But he took them home, looked after them and read them carefully. It was seven years since he had started to read such books and he had become convinced that his idolatry was false and that Christianity was true.

Now that he had found his way to the Mission station, he wanted to learn more about the Christian religion. One missionary, whose name was Jones, was amazed at how much the man knew about the Bible. “He seemed filled with the Word of God”, Jones felt.

Someone asked the man: “Who was your teacher?”

His answer was, “Jesus”, and he went on: “Has He not said, Ask, and ye shall receive?” quoting the words of Matthew’s Gospel.

He was allowed to stay at the Mission, and he was able to attend the services held there. He spent much of his time reading good books. It was obvious to the missionaries that this man was taught by God.

But there was an outbreak of cholera in the city. Cholera is a very serious disease, and the visitor to the Mission was one the first to catch it. Several times during his illness he told the missionaries that he was trusting in Christ. Sadly, he died of the disease; he was one of the first in the city whom it swept away. But the missionaries believed that this man was now resting “with Christ in glory”. They had seen few converts as a result of their work and they were feeling discouraged. But here was evidence that their efforts

were not in vain – that it really was worthwhile to be distributing the Bible and other Christian books.

We should learn that God the Holy Spirit is able to change the hearts of sinners through very limited means – in this case probably just parts of the Bible and small books. God’s people should be asking Him to work in the same sort of way today.

Probably you have much better opportunities to find out about salvation and the other teachings of the Word of God than the man who walked to the Mission station in Bangkok. You have, I assume, a complete Bible. You probably also have access to other good books and to scriptural sermons. But have you trusted in Jesus Christ as the Saviour whom God has provided for sinners like you? Do you even pray that God would bless these opportunities to you so that you would believe in this great glorious Saviour?

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## New Life in a Graveyard

We hardly look at lichen that grows on gravestones and stones in walls and dykes. Those light grey or greenish patches seem uninteresting to many – but not to lichenologists (people who study lichens). They tell us that on top of some lichens grows a layer of fungi which, parasite-like, lives on them. John Douglass, a lichenologist, recently discovered two very rare fungi, never seen before in the UK, growing on lichen on gravestones in Perthshire.

What is interesting about that? It certainly interested Mr Douglass, not only because he made a new discovery, but also because, as he said, he found new life growing in a graveyard – a place associated with death. “It’s like the circle of life in a way,” he said.

We do not usually connect life with the place where the dead are buried. Yet, in the Bible we do see life coming out of death, as it were. Jesus said, “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit” (John 12:24). He meant that He Himself was to die in order to obtain eternal life for His people.

Also He rose from the dead. The tomb was empty. “He is not here,” said the angel to the mourning women, “for He is risen. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.” Therefore He assures all who believe in Him: “Because I live, ye shall live also” (John 14:19). How glorious will be the resurrection to everlasting life that all believers shall have!

It is also interesting that these rare fungi contain chemical compounds which cannot be found anywhere else, and, we are told, might be used to

treat certain diseases. In any case, each plant, even an insignificant lichen, fungus or moss, has its own special qualities and fits into its own place in creation. As part of God's creation, they are all "very good" (Genesis 1:31), and like the rest of creation "declare the glory of God" (Psalm 19:1), although some may think they are useless.

God has made us also for His glory. But we are not good; we are bad because we are sinners, and we do not glorify God unless we have been born again. Yet we must glorify Him. How? Jesus gives the answer: "Repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15). Only when you do this (if you have not already done so) will you begin to glorify God and live a truly useful life, even although you might feel insignificant. But how can I repent and believe? you may ask. The repentance and faith you need are given only by God. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Luke 11:9). Then you too will have everlasting life. NMR

## The Bible's Teaching on Justification

### 2. Our Own Good Works Cannot Save Us

*Charles Hodge*

This series comes from *The Way of Life* and has been edited. Last month's article explained what the word *justification* means: for God to justify someone is to pronounce him or her righteous.

The great question then is, How is this righteousness to be obtained? We should be thankful that the Bible's answer to this question is perfectly plain. In the first place, the righteousness by which we are to be justified before God is not due to our works; the Bible not only states this but proves it. Paul begins with the fact that God's law demands a perfect righteousness. If the law could be satisfied by imperfect obedience, or by some outward duties, or by any service which we are able to give, then justification would indeed be by works. But since the law demands perfect obedience, justification by works is absolutely impossible for sinners.

This is how Paul argues: "As many as are of the works of the law, are under the curse. For it is written, cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them" (Galatians 3:10). The law pronounces a curse on everyone who does not do all that it commands. And no one can pretend to be perfectly obedient; so all who look to the law for justification must be condemned.

In the next verse, Paul says, "The law is not of faith, but the man that doeth them shall live by them". That is, the law is not satisfied by any single

grace or by imperfect obedience. The only ground of justification is obedience to all that it demands.

So Paul goes on to say, "If there had been a law which could have given life, verily righteousness would have been by the law" (Galatians 3:21). If the law could declare anyone righteous, and so make it possible for sinners to have eternal life, there would have been no need to provide salvation in some other way. But as the law cannot lower its demands, justification by the law is impossible. The same truth is taught in another verse: "If righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain" (Galatians 2:21). There would have been no need for Christ to die if our imperfect obedience could satisfy the law.

So Paul warns everyone who looks to works for justification that "he is a debtor to do the *whole* law" (Galatians 5:3); he owes obedience to the whole law. The law cannot demand less than what is right, and perfect obedience is right. Thus it still says, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them". So everyone who expects to be justified by works must be better than others – he must not only be very exact and do many things; he must be sinless.

At the foundation of all Paul says about the method of justification lies the fact that the law of God is absolutely strict in what it demands. Paul proves that the Gentiles have sinned against the law written on their hearts and that the Jews have broken the law revealed in their Scriptures. So both Jews and Gentiles are under sin; the whole world is guilty before God. Thus "by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight" (Romans 3:20).

How many people, who freely admit that they are sinners, depend on their works to be accepted by God! They do not see that they are inconsistent in this. They assume that the law may be satisfied by very imperfect obedience. Paul knows that God demands that everyone must do exactly what He says, and that His "wrath is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Romans 1:18).

It is not a question of degrees of sin, more or less, since "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God". Although this doctrine is so plainly taught in Scripture, most people think it very severe. They imagine that God will compare their good deeds with their evil deeds, and that they will then be rewarded or punished as the one class or the other is greater; they imagine that the sins of one part of their life may be atoned for by the good works of another, or that they can escape by confessing their sin.

They could not think like this if they believed that they were under a law. No human law is administered as men seem to hope the law of God will be. The person who steals or murders – even if it is just once, even if he confesses

and repents, even if he does any number of acts of charity – is still a thief or a murderer. The law cannot take account of his repentance and reformation. If he steals or murders, the law condemns him. Justification by the law is impossible for him.

But the law of God extends to the most secret thoughts of the heart. It condemns whatever is evil. If anyone breaks this perfect rule, justification by the law becomes impossible for him; he has failed to keep its conditions; the law can only condemn him. To justify him would be to say that he had not sinned. But people think that God will not deal with them on the principles of strict law. This is a fatal mistake. It is here that they come most directly into conflict with the Scriptures, which clearly teach that we are all under the law. God's strict law is just perfect excellence.

Even conscience, when it is enlightened and aroused, is as strict as the law of God. Neither repentance or reformation will make it go quiet. It enforces every command and every reproof of our Supreme Ruler. It teaches, as plainly as the Scriptures themselves, that it is impossible to be justified by imperfect obedience.

But we cannot rely on conscience. We must go to the Word of God, which clearly teaches that it is impossible for a sinner to be justified by works.

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## A Worshipper and a Witness

Abraham was a man who worshipped God. In Genesis 21:33 we read, "Abraham planted a grove in Beersheba, and called there on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God". The Holy Spirit has made sure that we would know that, when Abraham settled at Beersheba, he did so as one who worshipped God. Abraham, as a man of faith, was a man of worship. His worship was directed towards the Lord, "the everlasting God".

We all have a duty to worship God. The very fact that He is God, places a duty on us – as His responsible and thinking creatures – to worship Him. The Psalmist could say, "O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our maker" (Psalm 95:6). Abraham had come to know that God was the Lord, and it was his practice to worship Him. We read that he called on the name of the Lord. So we are to call upon the name of the Lord, in prayer and in praise, both in public and private worship.

Being an earnest worshipper of God, Abraham could not but be a witness for God. His worship was itself a witness to all who knew him – to his family, his servants, and the heathen that surrounded him. We do not read that great multitudes gathered to join Abraham in the worship of the living and true

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God, yet he was settled in the spirit and practice of worship. So today, when many flock to false religion and false worship, when they neglect the public worship of the living and true God, we are to hold fast to what is true. We are to hold fast to the worship of God, as witnesses on His side.

When Abraham sojourned at Beersheba he was an old man. It is interesting to note that, even in old age, he was a worshipper and a witness. Abraham was steadfast in his faith and worship, unlike many older people, who have no desire to worship God although they are so near death and eternity. Matthew Henry comments on Abraham at Beersheba: "There he made, not only a constant practice, but an open profession, of his religion".

Abraham, the man of faith, was a worshipper of God and a witness for God. We too should seek both to worship God, in public and private; and witness for Him in our time, wherever we live. In writing to Corinthian believers, the Apostle Paul expressed his thanks to God and encouraged them to go on as worshippers of God and as witnesses for Him: "But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:57,58). *(Rev) G B Macdonald*

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*For Younger Readers*

## In God's Care

**W**hen his ship was going to sea for another voyage, the captain would gather all his men around him. He would ask them: "Are we all here?"

The men would answer back: "Yes, Sir, and in God's care".

The captain's next question would be: "Is there anything then to be afraid of?"

And the men would all answer together: "No, there is nothing".

Then the captain and his men would all feel safe as the ship sailed out to sea. No matter what would happen, they could rest safe under the care of a good God. He is in control of everything.

But did all the men really know God, or were they just giving these answers out of habit? How important that question is!

If they knew God, they were trusting in Him. They knew that He is good. They knew that He would take care of them and all would

be well. Even if their ship sank and they were all drowned, it would still be well, because God would take them to heaven.

But if they did not know God, they could not be sure of His care.

So you should ask God, for Jesus' sake, to teach you about Himself, so that you may know Him. Ask Him to bring you to trust in Him. Then He will always care for you, and all will be well.

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*For Junior Readers*

## One Bible for 200 People

**D**o you know what a colporteur is? It is an old word for someone who travelled around selling Bibles and tracts, or giving them away. Many years ago Bibles were not so readily available as now. Then some colporteurs would travel far from home in their desire to share the Word of God and spread the good news of the gospel. This was no easy task in days when travelling was difficult, and at times even dangerous.

A long time ago one of these colporteurs travelled all the way to eastern Poland. He left just one Bible in a small village. The man who received it began to read it. The Lord blessed His precious Word to the man's soul and he was converted. He was so happy to have received such a wonderful gift that he passed the Bible on to others; he wanted to share the good news with his friends and everyone he knew in the village. Such a blessing followed it that, over a period of time, about 200 more people became believers.

A few years later, the colporteur returned to the village. How amazed he must have been to find all these people who had been blessed by reading the one Bible he had left there! He gathered them together and suggested that they might repeat some verses of Scripture.

One man then got up and said, "Perhaps we have understood wrongly. Did you mean verses or chapters?"

The colporteur was surprised. "Do you mean to say that there are people here who can recite whole chapters of the Bible?" he asked.

He was even more astonished when he found out that these poor villagers had learned by heart, not only chapters, but whole books of the Bible. There were 13 of them who knew Matthew and Luke and half of Genesis. One had committed all the Psalms to memory. Between them, the 200 villagers together knew almost the whole Bible by heart!

They explained: "We had to learn it, for if this copy of the Bible was lost or taken away from us, then where would we get another?"

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How these people valued the Word of God! What about you? Can you say with Job, “I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food”? Or with the man who wrote Psalm 119,

“The word that cometh from Thy mouth is better unto me  
Than many thousands and great sums of gold and silver be”?

*J van Kralingen*

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## Looking Around Us

### The Most Significant Places in History?

“Trying to pick the most significant places in history is not an easy task when there are so many contenders,” states an article on the BBC website, referring to a new television series. “But History of the World presenter Andrew Marr has narrowed it down to five.” They include Africa’s Great Eastern Rift Valley, because “this is where the human story really begins” – according to today’s evolutionary theories. But these theories reject God’s account of how the world, and mankind in particular, really did come into existence. But, sadly, one cannot expect that major bodies like the BBC will acknowledge the truth of the Bible’s account of creation.

The most surprising choice is Berkeley in Gloucestershire. This was where Edward Jenner, an English doctor, began vaccinating against smallpox. Berkeley is included because of the vast numbers of people whose lives were saved from what was a terrible disease. And many more have been protected from various other diseases by different kinds of vaccination.

All the other places have some claim to a position on the list of the most significant places in history. But what most disturbs one is that Jerusalem is not mentioned. It was where the temple was built and was the centre of true religion from the time of David till the time of Christ.

Though Jerusalem is no longer the centre of true religion, it was where Christ suffered unto death for the salvation of sinners throughout the world. No more significant event took place anywhere. And never will anything more significant take place anywhere till Christ will come the second time, to bring the world to an end.

Again, in today’s climate, one cannot expect that major bodies like the BBC will acknowledge the truth of Christianity, or do anything that will highlight its supreme significance. Instead, they generally promote the idea that all religions are equal and, indeed, that people are better off without any religion at all. But let each of us be clear that if we ignore the saving work of Christ, we will die in our sins – just as He warns us in the Bible.

## Counting the Cost

*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: "For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish" (Luke 14:28-30).

When Christ was on earth, it sometimes seemed that all the people would be converted. His miracles and His preaching drew many of them after Him. It was so when He spoke the words of the text. "Great multitudes" were going after Him. But Jesus knew that many of them had no love for Him. Their hearts were not in the matter at all. He never deceived any one. He never gave anyone cause to deceive himself. He asked men to think and to count the cost before they said they would follow Him. It is a great thing to serve God. He who lightly begins a religious life will soon turn to folly.

**1. Counting the cost of following Christ.** In doing so let us not shut our eyes to any truth. Honesty is the best policy. Nothing lasts like the truth.

(1.) If anyone would be a real Christian, he must be in earnest. If he should take pains about anything, surely it is about his soul. The real child of God fights battle after battle till he enters heaven. He is in danger as soon as he stops resisting the wicked one, his own sinful heart and a vain world. When he begins to think he is wise, holy, strong or safe, he is a fool and is in peril.

(2.) If you would be a real Christian, you must give time to it. At least every morning and evening, you must take time to worship God in secret, and in your family too, if you have one. You must not take journeys for pleasure or business on the Lord's Day. You are not free to buy and sell, or form plans, or think your own thoughts on the holy Sabbath. If you wish your soul to be saved, you must spend time on it. And you must not rob God of any of His time. The Sabbath is the Lord's.

(3.) If you would be a true Christian, you must sacrifice everything that duty requires. If you have stolen anything, you must restore it, or what it was worth. You must give up all tricks in trade, all lying and deceit in making bargains, all desire to buy an article for less than it is worth or to sell it for more than it is worth. It is wicked to cheat rich or poor. In some things we may not trade at all, like selling strong drink to a man we know will become drunk and harm his family (Habakkuk 2:9-16). A Christian must be kind to the poor, must do his part towards supporting and spreading the gospel. He must not forget that Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive".

(4.) A real Christian must sacrifice his sinful feelings. He must mortify [that is, put to death] the flesh with the affections and lusts. He must crucify envy, pride, vanity, revenge, self-will and love of money. He must die to sin and live to God. If he used to steal, he must stop stealing. If he used to lie, he must stop lying; he must speak the truth. He must not only break off some of his sins, but all of them. Some sins are very pleasant, but the Bible warns us against them. "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgement" (Ecclesiastes 11:9). He who will not give up the pleasures of sin must endure its punishment. "She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth."

(5.) He who would be Christ's disciple must agree to lose many friends. Just before our text the Saviour says, "If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26). I have known more than one child who, because he loved Christ, his father treated cruelly. Hatred to holiness has not yet left the world. All who will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution. When Ignatius, the martyr, came in sight of the wild beasts which were to devour him, he said, "Now I begin to be a Christian". Only those who suffer with Christ shall reign with Him. If there is no suffering, there is no salvation. "No cross, no crown." If anyone supposes that the world has ceased to hate goodness, he is quite wrong.

(6.) A true Christian gives up self-righteousness. He confesses that he has no merits of his own. He knows that, if he is ever saved, it must be by undeserved kindness. So he does not ask God for justice but for mercy. He knows that, if he will ever wear a crown in heaven, he must cast it at Jesus' feet and say for ever: "By the grace of God, I am what I am".

(7.) To sum up, the true Christian gives up everything he knows will hinder his heavenly life. This is necessary. Jesus Himself says, "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:33). This is right. No one can serve two masters. Every sincere friend of God is glad to give up everything that can offend God or hinder his salvation. Why should we not be willing to part even with an earthly crown, if we can wear a crown of righteousness? This is true wisdom.

All the Christian's sufferings are very short; so are all the wicked's joys. All the things of time, good and bad, will soon pass away for ever. What the Christian gives up can yield no comfort when he most needs comfort. Some years ago, a ship was bringing home many men with bags of gold from California. In a gale she began to leak badly; it was clear that she must sink.

What were bags of gold worth then? They were lying about like so much trash. So it will not be long till all such things will be of no value to anyone. Blessed is the one who finds this out in time and acts accordingly. Even in this world, earthly things upset the mind badly. The more we pursue them, the more they torment us. People are like a fly in the evening that sees the flame of a candle, darts through it, and is scorched. The advantages of the wicked are more apparent than real. Death, judgement, heaven and hell must be brought into the account if we would know the whole truth.

**2. Why should we count the cost?** (1.) Because wise people always count the cost. No one sensible builds a house, takes a journey, plants a crop or does anything without trying to find out if he can finish it. (2.) Because in religion our principles will all be tried, and tried severely. Sin is deceitful. The world is attractive. Satan is cunning. We are weak. If we set out on the way to heaven and, at every step, meet obstacles we did not expect, we shall be apt to turn back. (3.) Because, even in temporal things, it is a disgrace so to act that others say, "This man began to build, and was not able to finish. It is a greater disgrace for someone to become religious and then look back. Those who begin a religious life and turn away from it will be the laughing stock of the wicked for ever. (4.) Because he who counts the cost knows what he has to do and prepares to do it, and so ensures success.

**Conclusion.** (1.) Have you counted the cost of the course you are on? If you go on in the way of sin, you are living at a dreadful cost. You are losing precious time and opportunities. If you go on like this, you will lose your soul for ever. Does your conscience say you are doing right? In your most solemn moments do you approve of your own choice? What will you think of your conduct when you come to die? Do you believe there is a good man in heaven or a lost man in hell who thinks your course is right or safe or wise? Above all, does God approve of your life? He is to be the final Judge. (2.) Will you serve God on the terms He offers? Will you agree to a godly life? Will you deny yourself all ungodliness and worldliness, and live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world? Will you love the commandments and keep them? Will you give up all dishonest gain? Will you trust in Christ alone and agree to Him having all the glory of your salvation? Will you trample on your pride? Will you hate every false way? Will you count it a pleasure to serve God always, in every kind of company, and at all costs? (3.) It will not be long before everyone will wish he had been godly – according to the strictest rule, that of the Bible. When someone wicked dies and enters the awful realities of eternity, he must see that sin is madness, and that godliness is the only wisdom. Only God knows how soon you may die. You know it cannot be long, for the time is short even if one lives to be 100.

## Synod Resolution on the Internet

At its meeting earlier this year, the Synod decided to advise the people of the Church “not to use the internet on the Sabbath, except for the purposes of necessity and mercy”.

## Scripture and Catechism Exercises

**Corrections:** Two corrections to the the Old Testament part of the Intermediate Section in last month’s exercises. Here are the questions as corrected:

- 2 (b) What *were* the “instruments” that God used to provide him with food and drink? (3)  
 2 (c) What type of food was provided in the *three* places? (3)

### Overseas Prizes and Awards 2011-12

#### Senior Section

**Prizes:** *Auckland:* Dieuwe de Boer. *Connecticut:* Rachel Mack. *Grafton:* Chloe van Dorp. *Sengera:* Finlay Mogari. *Sydney:* Keith Marshall. *Thembiso:* Khulekani Dube.

**Awards with Merit:** *Auckland:* Bianca Jago, Amy Thomas. *Gisborne:* Anne-Marie Geuze. *Grafton:* Rachel and Mary Jean Brigden. *Sengera:* Eric Onwong’a, Mary Onwonga. *Thembiso:* Sukoluhle Khumalo, Maria Maphosa. *The Netherlands:* Jelle Bakker.

**Awards:** *Gisborne:* Finlay MacRae Cramp, Muriel Cramp. *Sydney:* Emily van Praag. *The Netherlands:* Gerben Bakker.

#### Intermediate Section

**Prizes:** *Auckland:* Anne Roos de Boer. *Connecticut:* Sarah R Mack. *Grafton:* Ally van Dorp. *Mbuma:* Rosemary Mphoko, Nobuhle Mpofo, Sithandweyinkosi Nkwane. *Sydney:* Duncan Marshall. *Sengera:* Josinah Aboki, Christine Mosoti. *Thembiso:* Kwaziwayinkosi Moyo. *Zenka:* Nobubelo Ndlovu, Moyo Singazi.

**Awards with Merit:** *Chesley:* Calvin Smith, Samuel Zekveld. *Connecticut:* Sarah R Mack. *Gisborne:* Annika and Emma van Dorp. *Mbuma:* Gugulethu and Langelihle Masuku, Isabel Moyo, Babili and Zibusiso Sibanda. *Sengera:* Joseph Obiye, Josephat Ogoti, Moses Oreng. *Zenka:* Velani Moyo.

**Awards:** *Auckland:* Lachlan McCrae. *Mbuma:* Iphithule Khabo, Sukoluhle Masuku, Matron Tshuma. *Sengera:* Christine Nyabuto, Vane Omweno. *Sydney:* Anna van Dorp, Heather and Zoe van Praag

#### Junior Section

**Prizes:** *Chesley:* Josiah Smith. *Gisborne:* Hannah Geuze. *Mbuma:* Shanaz Masango. *Sengera:* Macdonald Matara, Nelson Mogusu, Emma Nyabuto, Samuel Nyachwaya, Omuya Ondieki, Benard and Brian Onduso, Evans Torori. *Zenka:* Amanda Chakanyuka, Dube Sitshengisiwe.

**Awards with Merit:** *Auckland:* Jarrod Jago. *Mbuma:* Abigail Mpofo. *Sengera:* Duke Bernard, Philes Nyandwaro, Donald Oganda, Isabella Ontiri, Violet Ontunya, Rusiah Rabiki, Nehemiah Torori. *Sydney:* Kaitlin van Praag. *Thembiso:* Melisa Dube.

**Awards:** *Mbuma:* Sandulelo Khumalo, Sithabile Mpofo, Siphathisiwe Mpofo. *Sengera:* Lina Aboki, Joyce Kenyatta, Janet Nyabuto, Rebecca Nyamao, Justin Mokua, Naomi Nyakundi, Cicilia Nyabuto, Edwin Ratemo. *Singapore:* Nehemiah Chai Yong.

#### Upper Primary Section

**Prizes:** *Auckland:* Monique Jago. *Grafton:* Rachel van Dorp. *Mbuma:* Bongiwe Ndlovu,

Nzombiyethu Ngulube. **Sengera:** Mwango Aska, Peter Makori, Catherine Nyandwaro, Mbane Oganda, Bosibore Ondieki, Getrudy Orina. **Sydney:** Calum Marshall.

**Awards with Merit:** **Chesley:** Abigail Smith. **Gisborne:** Sarah van Dorp. **Mbuma:** Courage and Faith Dube, Lomacawe Maseko, Siyabulisiwe Ndlovu, Bridget and Rosseter Sibanda.

**Sengera:** Climent Bogita, Job David, Elizabeth Mokoro, Agnes Nyabunto, Jonathan Nyandwaro, Esther Omae, Climent Ombogo, Nyabuto Onduso, Kingslay Otara. **Sydney:** Nathan van Praag. **Zenka:** Pedina Mathenjwa.

**Awards:** **Mbuma:** Sizalobuhle Gumbo, Evelyn and Sithembinkosi Ndlovu, Thandolewenkosi Thebe. **Sengera:** Sibwoga Hesbon, Kevin Isaac, Brian and Jennifer Mokua, Wycliffe Nyabuto, Naomi Nyamao. **Singapore:** Owen Hayor Chai Yi. **Sydney:** Aidan van Praag. **Thembisio:** Yvonne Makwezwa, Nyasha Ndlovu, Philip Ruzvidzo.

#### **Lower Primary Section**

**Awards:** **Auckland:** Danielle and Diana Jago, Amelia Smith. **Chesley:** Isabel Alison Bouman.

**Connecticut:** Nathanael Mack. **Gisborne:** Matthew Geuze. **Grafton:** Andrew White. **Mbuma:** Talence Bhebhe, Thandeke Dube, Lizwilenkosi and Thando Gumpo, Nokuthaba, Zanele and Zibusiso Masuku, Faith, James, Sidumusile and Thobile Moyo, Mqondisi Mpofu, Bongeka Msipa, Gracious and Talent Ndlovu, Mercy and Mxolisi Ngwenya, Isabel Sagiya, Dean Annah Shoko, Brighton, Gracious, Thabisile and Thamsaqa Sibindi, Brighton Zikhali, Thabolwenkosi Zulu. **Sengera:** Brenda Alice, Kevin and Makori Amenity, Nancy Bogita, Lydia Kenyatta, Brian Makinda, Kerubo Mokoro, Elizabeth Mokua, Innocent Nyandieka, Sylvia Nyakundi, Dorica and Kemunto Nyakwara, Sigara Obondi, Simeon Ogoti, Esther Ogando, Dolvin Okenagwa, Francis Omune, Makori Ondieki, David Ong'ata, Zachariah Orange, Kevin Otara, Alice and Brian Rabiki, Elizabeth Sigara, Nyabuto Simeon, Nyakuta Stella. **Zenka:** Sithole Nothando, Blessings Gwizi, Ashly Ndebele. **Sydney:** William and Hugh Marshall, Abigail May Swinn, Samuel van Praag.

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## **Australia and NZ Youth Conference**

The 2013 Youth Conference in Australia will be held, God willing, from 1.30 pm on Tuesday, January 8, til 3 pm on Thursday, January 10, at the Winmalee Christian Conference Centre in the Blue Mountains. The Lower age limit is 16. The cost is A\$120. Payments can be made on arrival at the conference, but please e-mail Mr J van Praag *as soon as possible* to tell him that you intend to attend (jnvp@aapt.net.au).

The papers and speakers for this Conference are as follows:

**The Westminster Assembly – Its Work and Legacy** *Mr C MacKenzie*  
**The Regulative Principle and Instrumental Music in Public Worship**

*Rev E A Rayner*

**Mormonism: Not the Church of Jesus Christ**  
**Assurance of Personal Salvation**

*Rev J Smith*

*Rev G B Macdonald*

**Martin Luther and the Reformation**

*Mr H Opland*

**Price 90p**