

# The Young People's Magazine

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## Looking Back

One hundred years ago, the world was a much larger place than it is today; to get from Britain to Australia, for instance, meant a voyage lasting several weeks. But on 17 December 1903, at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, the Wright brothers made four very short flights, lasting from 12 to 59 seconds. Theirs was the first powered, heavier-than-air machine to achieve controlled, sustained flight with a pilot aboard.

That year, the Free Presbyterian church was ten years old. Ministers and congregations would be conscious that they were a small body, in comparison with the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church, which had hundreds of thousands attending their services. But Free Presbyterians could at least be thankful that the events of 1893 had preserved a consistent witness in Scotland for God's truth.

By the early 1840s it had become obvious that the Church of Scotland was no longer free to manage its own affairs without the civil courts interfering. Clearly, the courts were not interpreting the law properly, but the government was not prepared to intervene to put things right. The only alternative for those who valued the independence of the Church, under Christ, was to take up a separate position. So, in 1843, more than 470 ministers and large numbers of people left in what became known as the Disruption, and the Free Church of Scotland was formed.

During the years up to 1892 there were clear signs that many ministers within the Free Church were no longer prepared to hold consistently to the truths of the Bible, and most prominent in spreading wrong teaching were the professors in its colleges. All the ministers of the Church had made vows before God that they sincerely believed the teachings of the Bible; they declared that they held to the doctrines of the Westminster Confession of Faith. But in many cases it was obvious from their sermons and writings that they did not really believe what the Bible says.

So what did the Church do? Obviously it should not have allowed them to continue as ministers if they were not faithful to their vows. Instead, it decided to change its constitution so that such men could continue as ministers

with an easy conscience – although, if they thought properly about their relationship to God, their consciences would have felt very uncomfortable. That change was brought about by the Church's General Assembly passing what was called a Declaratory Act. Perhaps the most dangerous feature of this Act was that it recognised a “diversity of opinion” in the Church “on such points in the Confession as do not enter into the substance of the Reformed Faith therein set forth”. But nobody ever said how much of the Confession of Faith was to be regarded as the substance of the Reformed Faith. Today the Church of Scotland operates under the same sort of system; the result is that ministers may deny almost any of the doctrines of the Bible and nothing can be done to remove them from their pulpits.

Men like Rev Donald Macfarlane were very concerned about the Declaratory Act. They realised that the only proper response to the situation was to separate from the Free Church. But they were persuaded to wait for a year so that the next General Assembly of the Church would have the opportunity to reverse its decision. The 1893 General Assembly arrived; the subject of the Declaratory Act came before it; and by a huge majority it stuck to its decision of the previous year. Mr Macfarlane at once came forward with a protest – a formal objection to what the Assembly had done. This was the means he used to separate from a Church which was no longer standing on the firm foundation of Scripture. The only other minister to join him was Rev Donald MacDonald of Shieldaig. Exactly 110 years ago this month the first Presbytery meeting took place in Mr Macfarlane's own congregation of Raasay, on 28 July.

In 1903 the Church had around 65 congregations, all of them in Scotland. The *Free Presbyterian Magazine* was then in its eighth year. Besides the sermons and other positive spiritual teaching in each issue, it was bearing witness against, among other things, “the prevalence of atheism” and the visit of King Edward VII to the Pope. Sadly, atheism has far more influence today and more respect is being given to the Pope in Britain than at any time since the Reformation.

Prominent in these issues of the Magazine are accounts of godly men who were leaders in their congregations when it was necessary to stand up for the truth in 1893. One of these was Angus Gray from Lairg, who died at the age of 94. When he was a young man, the local minister foolishly persuaded him to become a member of the Church – but he was not converted. In his own words: “Soon after that I was called to pray in meetings, and people were thinking well of me, and I was of the same opinion myself. By and by, they made me an elder. I was not long in that office when I began to know the strength of sin and the terrors of the Lord. I fell into such deep thought that

I could not read or pray . . . I could not believe that there was a God. I felt very miserable and, had it not been that I had a wife and family, I would have fled from the country. One day, as I was going along the road driving a horse and cart, the words, ‘Our God is a consuming fire’, came like thunder. These words filled me with fear and I felt as if between two hedges – an angry God on the one side and a broken law on the other, and my heart filled with enmity against both.

“For some months I was in that fearful pit. Then it was He sent His Word and healed me. These words in John’s First Epistle: ‘Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins’, were made specially precious to me then. Then I had great joy in the finished work of the Redeemer. And you see I needed a sore cure for the false religion of my younger days.”

Angus Gray was thoroughly unhappy as he watched changes taking place in the Free Church. So he experienced “the sincerest pleasure” when he heard of the first Presbytery meeting of the Free Presbyterian Church. But moves for union between this Church and the Free Church after 1900 “filled him with the deepest anxiety”. He was convinced that the relevant verse of Scripture was: “Let them return unto thee; but return not thou unto them” (Jeremiah 15:19). He was concerned – and rightly so – that the Free Church (now a much smaller body, because the majority had united in 1900 with the United Presbyterian Church to form the United Free Church) was not as faithful to its principles as it should have been. Perhaps, if he was alive today, Angus Gray would not have been altogether surprised to read a recent issue of the *Free Church Record* in which the opening article discusses the *Lord of the Rings* film and makes clear how much the Editor enjoyed it.

Today the Free Presbyterian Church has fewer congregations in Scotland than 100 years ago. But it has spread right round the world. In 1904 Rev John B Radasi set sail for Africa and the next year began the Free Presbyterian Mission in what is now Zimbabwe. The most recent addition to the Church is a congregation in Odessa, in the Ukraine. There are not many people; they have no church building; but from there thousands of Bibles and other good books are being circulated. If it would please God to bless such efforts, great fruit might yet result. Who knows what a small seed may grow to?

What we need everywhere is God’s blessing. Apart from that, none of us will remain faithful to the principles which have been handed down to us. In a world which has become so much smaller because of air travel and other developments, we should ask the Lord to bless our efforts to spread the gospel in various countries. In particular, we should ask Him to help us to value the precious heritage which has been handed down to us.

## Mungaw

*Margaret Paton*

This article is an abridgement of a much longer account in Mrs Paton's *Letters From the South Seas*, recently republished by the Banner of Truth Trust. At this time she and her husband John G Paton were missionaries on the island of Aniwa in the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu), in the Pacific. Several extracts from Paton's *Autobiography* have been printed in these pages. Mungaw had been a promising young man who became a member of the church but began to act strangely and to assault Litsi his wife.

One day, before John was quite recovered from illness, I told him I was sure Mungaw would do some harm before long. And just an evening or two afterwards, we heard him shouting and scolding from his house in an awful voice. John limped off, in spite of my entreaties to let them fight it out, and found Mungaw flourishing an axe over a poor woman, whose husband was away from home and who had been helping Litsi to cook his fish, but had been unfortunate enough not to know that on that particular evening he wanted it wrapped in a different kind of leaf from what was usual. He had brought the axe within a few inches of her shoulder when two or three islanders, attracted to the spot just before John, held his arm and wrenched it from him. He got his musket next, but poor Litsi ran to our house for protection, while John and the islanders tried to calm him down. They got his musket from him, and I saw a teacher slip it behind a tree in our lawn; but Mungaw was sharp enough to notice and got it away again when the affray was over, and ordered poor Litsi back to her cooking. John's spirit always rises equal to the emergency, but I get perfectly faint with terror – and the longer the worse.

Next morning, he demanded the keys from John, as he wanted to sharpen his axe at the grindstone. John said, "No, Mungaw, you'll learn to put your axe to a better use first; and I want you to return the two you have of mine". He looked the picture of innocent wonder, and replied, "What do you mean?" John replied, "I just mean that I want you to give up your bad conduct." "My bad conduct! What have I done?" protested Mungaw. John said pointedly, "Do you not know, Mungaw?" That was all the provocation he got; but he went off for his musket, muttering, "I'll let you know who you're talking to!"

When he was gone, John went out to his printing office for something, and on leaving it saw Mungaw just inside our fence taking deliberate aim at him with his musket, John turned round to lock the door, showing no signs of fear, but feeling that all was over and that he was to be shot down so near us all, and yet none near enough to save him. But God was watching! The

next instant he heard a rush of feet, a scuffle, and looked round to see the musket pointed high in the air and four strong arms grappling with the intended murderer. Two men had been accidentally (?) coming up the path, took in the scene at a glance, and my husband was saved.

I knew nothing of what was happening, but feeling restless after Mungaw's parting look, went out to hurry John in for worship. I met him coming in, and stopped short at the sight of his pale face to ask if he were ill, and he told me all. We had just begun to sing at worship when Mungaw reappeared flourishing his musket, trying the doors and windows (you may believe I had them securely fastened by this time) and demanding entrance. We went on, taking no notice, but the girls rushed into the dining-room in great fear. Meanwhile, the news spread like wild-fire, and the church members nearby came running to order him out of the premises, which only made him wilder; so they seized him and bound him hand and foot with ropes. It was a terrible scuffle, for he had the strength of ten men, and yelled like a demon.

None of the villagers slept, two of their lives being in danger. It was a most anxious Sabbath, and we had worship under difficulties – guards being placed at our house and the main approaches to the church. But we tried to realize that the Lord Jesus was encompassing us around, and that He stood between us and Mungaw. The people begged John to be short, as they were in terror, so we had only one service in church and a prayer meeting instead of Sabbath School. Afterwards, John urged the different villagers to take turns to sleep near Mungaw's house for Litsi's protection. We were half the night praying for the helpless girl, so completely at the mercy of that madman.

Next morning, he came musket in hand, working himself up into a frenzy, when, to our great joy, "Sail ho!" rang out, and it was comical to see how quickly he had to subside before this counter-excitement and slink away! We felt it was in answer to prayer, more especially when a little afterwards he stood before our gate and told our herd boys that he was going in the vessel if she called here. How earnestly we asked the Lord to let him go, if it were His will, but prayed above all for submission to bear what was appointed us, for we had the feeling he would stay.

He boastfully acknowledged the part he had acted the day before, declaring that, if they had not *said* they were going to fight, it was what they meant – why else were they carrying their muskets? When John thought they'd had enough of it, he suggested that one of them should engage in prayer, and let them then get home. A fine old Chief stood up under the banyan tree, and, waving his hand with a majesty an islander can assume at times, offered a simple, earnest prayer, and the people quietly dispersed. John sent for Mungaw and had long talks with him but saw it was little use.

Litsi fled with her two little ones to spend the night in a plantation. Amid all her own danger, she was mindful of us and sent a messenger to warn us that Mungaw would be sure to burn the house that night if he could. But we were specially reminded of Some One watching over us. It began to pour torrents of rain, as it so often did when there was imminent danger. Poor Litsi was made tolerably comfortable in body for the night, there being an old deserted hut in the plantation. Mungaw got fearfully roused at not finding her by the afternoon; he told our boys in a voice of suppressed rage that he was now going to Touleka to kill Litsi if he found her there. One of them flew through the bush to warn her of his approach, and John and I went to the study to commit her to God. I think I should have gone mad myself if we had not had our never-failing Refuge in these troublous times!

Some of the islanders came to ask what was to be done with Mungaw. Tying only made him worse; to confine him was impossible. Were they to shoot him? John, of course, would not hear of that, and they asked if there was no sort of medicine to cure madness!

A near friend got Mungaw away to his village. The moment he went, I ran off to sit awhile with Litsi. We feared she would sink under her trials, and wished she had access to the rich consolations with which we were upheld every day in our little readings both of the Bible and other books. It seemed as if the words were printed for our express circumstances and comfort. My own morning reading was in the Psalms, and I never felt them so suitable, and favourite passages were more precious than ever. I never noticed before that the passage, "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I", begins with: "From the end of the earth will I cry unto Thee" – so applicable to us! John and I have often remarked to each other that we had to come all the way to the South Seas to understand some bits of the Bible.

How we wished poor Litsi could share all these privileges, and wondered if her faith were keeping alive at all. But her spirit was beautifully submissive. I told her that, however difficult it might be for her to believe it, her Saviour God was tenderly caring for her every moment and would not let her have one more trial than she could bear, and that it would relieve her to take all her sorrows to Him. She replied, "O I know it, my whole words now are prayer; for I have no one else to speak to, and would have gone mad if I could not have told my Saviour! I tell Him everything, and know that it's all right even if Mungaw should kill me, for he can't harm me beyond the grave." I told her not a single night passed that we were not engaging in prayer for her, and she said, "These prayers have been answered, for he has had the wish to kill me and burn your house, and he could easily have done both had not God prevented".

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## “The Lord Was with Joseph”

### 6. First Minister of Egypt

*Rev Neil M Ross*

This is another part of the paper given at the 2000 Youth Conference. Last month's instalment dealt with Joseph's wrongful imprisonment.

The set time for Joseph's promised *elevation to high honour* had now come, and it came very swiftly. “Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him hastily (literally, *made him run*) out of the dungeon” (Genesis 41:14). Psalm 105 informs us about Joseph in verses 20 and 21:

“Then sent the king, and did command that he enlarged should be:

He that the people's ruler was did send to set him free.

A lord to rule his family he raised him, as most fit;

To him of all that he possessed he did the charge commit.”

The change which suddenly took place in Joseph's circumstances on that memorable day was most remarkable. In the morning he was in the dungeon; before the day finished he rode in a royal chariot while the king's servants commanded the people to bow the knee before him. In the morning he was the king's prisoner, in the evening the king's prime minister. In the morning he was in prison garb, in the evening in royal robes.

One cause of Joseph's elevation was his consistent diligence and trustworthiness in whatever business he was engaged in. We ourselves can be sure that if we carry out our responsibilities conscientiously – whether in our studies or in employment – we will reap the benefit in due course. The Bible says, “Seest thou a man diligent in his business? He shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men” (Proverbs 22:29). More importantly, if we give the first place to the greatest business in life, we will profit both in this life and in the next. Jesus said, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33). And Paul wrote, “Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come” (1 Timothy 4:8).

Joseph not only interpreted Pharaoh's dreams, showing that there would be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine; he also advised Pharaoh what he should do to avert the awful consequences of the famine: “Now therefore let Pharaoh look out a man discreet and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh do this, and let him appoint officers over the land, and take up the fifth part of the land of Egypt in the seven plenteous years. And let them gather all the food of those good years that come, and lay up corn under the hand of Pharaoh, and let them keep food in the cities.

And that food shall be for store to the land against the seven years of famine, which shall be in the land of Egypt; that the land perish not through the famine” (Genesis 41:33-36). Pharaoh was convinced that there was no better man to implement the suggested plan than Joseph himself. Pharaoh was also shrewd enough to see that to have Joseph as his deputy in ruling the nation would be advantageous – and so it proved.

We have already noted that, when Joseph interpreted dreams, he was careful to attribute those interpretations to God. He did this *repeatedly*. You will remember that he asked the butler and baker: “Do not interpretations belong to God?” And when Pharaoh asked for the interpretation of his dreams, Joseph immediately replied, “It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace” (Genesis 41:16). Finally, after Joseph gave Pharaoh the interpretation, he said, “God hath showed Pharaoh what He is about to do”. Joseph, we see, was making it very clear that he would not take any honour to himself for interpreting these dreams; all the glory must be given to God. One result was that even pagan Pharaoh himself gave some recognition to God; he told Joseph: “God hath showed thee all this”.

This teaches us that, whatever abilities we possess, we must acknowledge that we are indebted to God for them all, and that it is He who must be thanked and glorified. In Jeremiah 9, we read, “Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me, that I am the Lord”.

At the same time, we are also to glorify God by using to His glory whatever abilities He has given us. To misuse and abuse even one talent is to stand in danger of being condemned as “wicked and slothful”, like the servant who hid his one talent in the ground (Matthew 25:26).

As Joseph – now the powerful governor of Egypt – implemented his scheme for food storage and famine relief, he prospered greatly; so also did Pharaoh and the whole nation. As surely as Joseph’s prosperity in Potiphar’s home was due to the Lord’s presence – “The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man” – so it was in Pharaoh’s palace. At the same time, because Joseph had the Lord’s presence, he also had the Lord’s preserving care, even in the pagan environment of the palace. We too will be safe only if we have the Lord’s presence and favour.

I have no doubt that Joseph prayed for Pharaoh and others in positions of great authority in Egypt. Paul lays the same duty upon us: “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty”

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(1 Timothy 2:1,2). The fact that godly Joseph was at the helm of the state in Egypt was an important factor in the wellbeing of the nation at that time. Clearly, we should plead with the Lord that He would raise up God-fearing leaders in our nation. When such men are raised up, it will not only be for the good of the state but also for the good of the Church of God. Joseph was elevated in order that the Church of God in his time would be preserved – but we leave that until the next instalment.

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## The Bible First

*J B Waterbury*

This is chapter 23 from the book, *Advice to a Young Christian*; it has been edited. The previous chapter, in last month's issue, was on the value of the Bible.

I wish you always to remember that a high standard of godliness is closely connected with reading the Scriptures diligently. People usually recommend various books on Christian living to young believers, and I gladly join in recommending such books. But I am afraid that young Christians have sometimes given less attention to the Bible by paying too much attention to other reading. The Bible must have the first place.

In recommending such books, Christians have taken it for granted that the Bible is being diligently and closely studied; but they have taken too much for granted. A taste for religious novelty has been excited, and the precious Word has at last become comparatively uninteresting. If any merely human book – however instructive it may be – is to have more of our attention than the Bible, we should throw it aside and reread the Scriptures until we give it its proper prominence in our hearts.

When young Christians become addicted to these religious books, they are very apt to neglect the Bible. They acquire a recklessness in discussing the superficial parts of Christianity. But, I insist, such reading does not form in them a sound, consistent and deeply spiritual character. Far be it from me to undervalue such reading. But I wish to impress upon your mind the superiority of God's Word. When other religious books throw light on the Bible, when they drive you back to this great fountain of truth, when they make you more diligent in studying it – and act as servants rather than rivals – they may be read with profit. But if you find that they draw away your interest from the Word of God and excite a taste for novelties, you must suspect that they are in competition with the Bible. You must immediately give again your highest affections to that precious book, to which they rightfully belong.

This warning is all the more necessary because large numbers of slightly-religious magazines and novels are being published. Some people whose consciences might react against ordinary novels may be attracted to these. There is here a strong temptation to young Christians. I warn them against it. I would not entirely restrict their reading to the Word of God. I would be far from prohibiting any innocent, instructive book. Let them be acquainted with poetry and history, for instance, but I would guard against putting this reading above the Bible. I believe there never can be a high Christian character where the Bible is not made the first – and the best and most interesting – of books. Anyone who cannot lay aside a book, however interesting, for the Bible – and who does not take greater pleasure in the Bible – has never reached a high standard of godliness.

It has been said that everything a minister studies should have some reference to the Word of God and that, whatever he has been reading, he should come back with greater relish to the Bible. The same advice should be given to the young Christian. Whatever he reads, the Bible should be his richest banquet. Make it a rule always to prefer it. If you are strongly drawn towards some interesting new religious publication and are tempted to omit the regular study of the Scriptures, think of it as a temptation and resist it accordingly. Henry Martyn, a well-known missionary to India, would never allow himself to read a book for one moment after he felt himself preferring it to his Bible. As long as he could turn to his Bible with a greater relish, he would continue reading – and no longer.

Go and do likewise. If you begin with this resolution, you will find its advantages day by day. You will value the Word of God more and more, and you will be ready to exclaim with David, “O how love I Thy law”; “it is sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb”.

My own experience convinces me that, the oftener and the more diligently you read the Scriptures, the more beautiful they will appear and the less taste you will have for superficial reading. There is something sanctifying in becoming truly familiar with the Scriptures. You feel a satisfaction in reading them which no purely human writings can give. You feel as if you were conversing with God and angels. You breathe a heavenly atmosphere.

Let us go then every day to this fountain of light and life. Here is a healing influence. Here is the pool of Bethesda. Here is an abundance of comfort for those in trouble. Here is hope to cheer and to guide. Bind this precious Book about your neck. Write it on your heart. It will prove your shield in conflict, your guide in perplexity, your comfort in difficulty. If you have studied the Bible faithfully in this life, it will afford themes for heavenly thought through eternity, when “death is swallowed up in victory”.

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*For Junior Readers***Lost**

**H**ave you ever been lost? Perhaps you were in a shopping centre or a museum and you got separated from the rest of your family. You did not know where they were, and they could not find you. Maybe you felt a sick, sinking feeling in your stomach as you wondered how long it would take for someone to find you. And maybe you wondered if you would ever be found.

Perhaps you were on a country walk and you wandered away from the others. You took a different path and you could not retrace your steps. Yet, although you were lost, you knew it was likely that someone would come and find you before long. But if you were an explorer in some unknown territory, getting lost might have been much more serious – especially if you were in a desert or somewhere dangerous. Then, if you were not rescued quickly, your life might be in danger.

Well, these are just illustrations of what we all are spiritually. And they are very poor illustrations. We are lost sinners. To be a lost sinner is far more serious than what you have read about in these illustrations.

In several places, the Bible compares us to lost sheep. David confessed that he had gone astray like a lost sheep. To be a lost soul is to be in a truly miserable condition, on the way to an endless eternity. Do you remember the answer in the Shorter Catechism that describes this misery: “All mankind by their fall lost communion with God, are under His wrath and curse, and so made liable to all the miseries in this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell for ever”? What a sad prospect!

But that is not all. What else has God revealed to us in the Bible? In two different places we find almost the same words of Christ: “The Son of man is come to save that which was lost” (Matthew 18:11), and: “The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).

So God has provided a Saviour for lost sinners. *The Son of man*, as I hope you know, is another name for Jesus Christ. He, “being the eternal Son of God, became *man*, and so was, and continues to be, God and man in two distinct natures, and one person for ever”. So there is hope for lost sinners like you and me. Christ came into this wicked world, not only to save, but “to seek and to save” lost, sinful children and adults. Isn’t that wonderful? The Apostle Paul shows his wonder at this great truth in the well-known verse which sums up the whole gospel: “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief” (1 Tim 1:15).

Surely, then, you will not be content to stay lost. Will you not pray to God

that He would seek and save your poor soul? Will you not pray in the words of the Psalmist:

“I like a lost sheep went astray;  
Thy servant seek and find”? (Psalm 119:176)

And will you not resolve, in the words of another Psalm:

“When Thou didst say, Seek ye My face,  
then unto Thee reply  
Thus did my heart, Above all things  
Thy face, Lord, seek will I”? (Psalm 27:8)

However important other things may appear to you at this moment, this is far more important than everything else. God is saying to you, “Seek ye the Lord while He may be found”.  
*J van Kralingen*

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*For Younger Readers*

## The Best Friend

**D**o you have many friends? It is good to have friends. But we should choose our friends carefully. Some friends may want us to do what is wrong. These are not good friends.

But do you have a best friend? Is there someone you really like and who really likes you? Is there someone who you want to have with you all the time?

Do you ever think that God should be your friend? In the Bible we read about Abraham. He is called the friend of God. It means that God really loved Abraham, and Abraham loved God too.

When Abraham was a boy, he lived in a very wicked city called Ur. The people there did not love God. They were not God's friends. They never worshipped Him.

But one day God spoke to Abraham. God told him to leave Ur. But God did not tell him where he was to go.

Do you think Abraham obeyed? Yes, he did. He left Ur, the city where he had lived all his life till then. He obeyed God, although he did not know where he was to go when he left Ur.

But Abraham was God's friend. He knew that God would not tell him to do anything that was not good. And God showed him where he was to go.

Abraham never again lived in a house. He spent the rest of his life living in a tent. You see, Abraham was not going to live in this

world always. And, because he was God's friend, he must go to be with God in heaven when he died.

Those who live in tents can easily take them down and go to live somewhere else. That was what Abraham did. Wherever he lived, he could easily move on to somewhere else. And when he arrived there, he could set up his tent again and settle down.

At last the time came for Abraham to die. This world was not really his home. He had friends in this world, but he had a better Friend in heaven. Who was that? It was God. And when Abraham died, God took him to heaven. Abraham will never need to take up his tent and move somewhere else.

That is how it is with all God's friends. Like Abraham, they may have to move from place to place in this world. But they all go to heaven and settle down there, and God will always be their friend.

Ask God to make you His friend. If you become His friend, He will always take care of you. He will show you what is right. And at last He will take you to heaven.

There is no better friend you can have. There is nothing more important than to have God as your friend.

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## The Book of Ruth

### 64. The Secret of the Lord

*Rev Keith M Watkins*

Ruth 3:14 "And she lay down at his feet until the morning: and she rose up before one could know another. And he said, Let it not be known that a woman came into the floor."

All day long, Boaz had been busy with his harvest. After the evening meal with his workers, he slept there, out in his fields, at the threshing floor. At midnight he was startled to find a woman lying at his feet. It was Ruth the Moabitess, who had come to ask him to marry her. He agreed, promising to do everything necessary. So Ruth lay down again. As soon as morning light began to appear, before anyone could properly see anyone else, Ruth got up, to return home. At this stage, Boaz did not want anyone to know that he and Ruth had met. So he said, "Let it not be known that a woman came into the floor". For the time being, what passed between them was to remain a secret.

Ruth's visit to Boaz ended as it began: in secret. If anyone had seen her come and go, they could easily have thought that she had obtained nothing

from Boaz. She had not become his wife; she was still a widow. Had she made no progress? Had she failed in her mission?

Someone who did not hear her conversation with Boaz may have thought so. But they would be wrong. She had opened her heart to Boaz, telling him all her desire. He had likewise opened his heart to her, promising to do as she desired. These were great things. Ruth knew. Boaz knew. But no one else knew. For it all took place in secret. "Let it not be known".

It is often like this when sinners have dealings with the Saviour. The hypocrite loves to conduct his religion very publicly: what he does, he does to be seen by other people. But the heart of a true believer's religion is an inward thing. Much of it is hidden from the eyes of others. It goes on secretly. The believer knows about it. Christ knows about it. Others may see the fruits in the believer's outward life, but they cannot know what has actually passed between the believer and Christ – no more than people could tell what had passed between Ruth and Boaz. "Let it not be known".

Did you ever experience these secret things? Like Ruth with Boaz, did you ever open your heart to the Saviour? Did you ever tell Him all your needs as a poor sinner? Did you ever ask Him to take you into union with Himself? And like Boaz with Ruth, did Christ ever speak to you? Did He ever speak to your heart? Did He ever open His Word to your soul, so that you knew He was speaking with you in particular? Did you ever hear Him promising that He would marry you to Himself? "I will betroth thee unto Me for ever" (Hosea 2:19).

Often these secret things pass between Christ and His people when they are alone. Nicodemus came to Christ "by night" for a secret meeting. He heard wonderful things from the Saviour's lips – things he did not fully understand at the time: the new birth and the Redeemer's atoning death. But he was never the same again. As a result of that secret encounter, he later spoke up publicly for Christ in the council: "Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth?" (John 7:51). Also as a result of that secret meeting, he acted publicly in caring for Christ's dead body. But the meeting itself was just between him and the Saviour. No one else could know the things that had passed between him and Christ.

These secret things can also take place in the middle of a vast congregation. The woman with the issue of blood came secretly to Christ, even though Jesus was in the middle of a vast crowd, with many people pressing upon Him. She quietly touched the hem of His garment. Instantly she was healed, and she knew it, for "she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague" (Mark 5:29). And Jesus knew it, for He knew "in Himself that virtue had gone out of Him" (verse 30). But no one else knew. Listen to the disciples:

“Thou seest the multitude thronging Thee, and sayest Thou, Who touched Me?” (verse 31). Of course, what began as a secret was soon made known to everyone, for the Saviour insisted that she openly declare what had happened. But it is important to realise that you must meet Christ in secret before you can give a true testimony to His grace.

In public worship, a multitude gathers around the Saviour. But within the crowd, unseen to the eyes of men, individual souls are actually meeting with the Lord. Like the rest, they hear the Saviour’s invitations to come to Him for pardon and healing. But unlike the others, they actually come to Him by faith. Everyone hears about the spiritual beauty and grace of Christ, but only some begin to admire Him and love Him. And no one knows except themselves! As yet it is a secret. These people are being brought spiritually into the innermost chambers of the King (see Song of Solomon 1:4). Have you ever known this intimacy with Christ during public worship, as if only you and He were there?

This is how Christ makes Himself known to His people, and not to the world (see John 14:22). This is “the secret of the Lord” which is with God’s people. As Psalm 25:14 explains the expression, having the Lord’s secret is to understand the covenant of God’s free grace in Christ. “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him; *and He will shew them His covenant*”. As is often the case in Hebrew poetry, the two halves of the text explain each other. The Lord reveals a great secret to His fearing people – and only to them. What is it? It is His covenant!

So, being shown the secret of the Lord is the same as being given a saving understanding of the covenant of grace. In that covenant, sinners are married to Christ in a spiritual union that will never be broken. Just as Boaz told Ruth how he was going to arrange their marriage, so in the covenant Christ speaks to His people of uniting them to Himself in the bonds of everlasting love.

And He loves to tell them secretly, for it is only to His people that the wonders of covenant love are revealed. Only they are brought to marvel at the wisdom revealed in the covenant scheme of salvation. Only they value Christ’s eternal engagements to be the Mediator of the covenant. Only they come to trust in the blood of this everlasting covenant, the blood that Jesus shed for the remission of sins. Only they realise how sufficient and suitable the provisions of the covenant are for their case.

To begin with, only Ruth knew what was in the heart of Boaz towards her. Only Ruth knew that he had promised to do everything necessary for their marriage. As for others, “let it not be known”. So with God’s people. Only they understand Christ’s personal love. Only they value His covenant promises from eternity – to suffer and do all that was required to secure

sinner's spiritual union with Him. But as for those who go on in sin and unbelief, the covenant secrets of the Lord are not with them. As long as they go on in that condition, they cannot know them.

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## On the Sands of Time

Robert Roberts was one of the best-known ministers in Wales just over 200 years ago. He has been described as an "extraordinary preacher". One day he used the incoming tide as an illustration of the way sin creeps up on people without them noticing.

"The day was fine and beautiful," he told the congregation, "the sands gleamed in the sun, and the tide was far out in the distance. A number of men, full of joy and glee, come upon those sands to play some wild game. They play on; the interest in the game increases; the players become more deeply engrossed; their enthusiasm is higher; and they are quite absorbed. They forget altogether that they are playing on the sands and that the rolling ocean is not far away. The tide has already turned, and the lashing of the loud-sounding waves comes nearer and nearer. But they do not hear it; the tide rises and the sea has at last surrounded them, except at one point where there is a narrow tract of land over which they may yet escape. At this point, a man on the shore notices their danger and shouts with all his might, 'The sea is around you. Escape by the tract of sand on your right! Quick, or it will be too late!'"

Roberts' description was so vivid that some of the people thought for a moment that they were actually on the shore with the waves ready to sweep them away, and they rose from their seats to flee. Of course, they soon realised their mistake and settled down again. Roberts then applied his illustration to their spiritual danger and warned them to flee to Christ from the waves of divine wrath which were ready to carry them away.

Today people are acting much as they were in Roberts' time. Most of them are going on as if life was just a game. They pay no attention to the fact that it must come to an end, perhaps very suddenly. They do not think about it. They are too engrossed in the ordinary events of each day – and in any case they do not *want* to think about spiritual realities. They do not want to face up to the fact that eternity may be very close.

Perhaps they hear a preacher telling them: "The sea is around you. Escape by the way of salvation which God has appointed – through Jesus Christ, who died for sinners. Quick, or it will be too late!" But do they really listen? Do they take it to heart? Do they flee to Christ? Do you?

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## Looking Around Us

### An American Evangelist

The latest wave of American evangelism to hit Scotland is that of Steve Hill, who led a three-night crusade in late May at Braehead on the outskirts of Glasgow. It is said that more than 7500 attended, over three nights.

According to a newspaper report, Hill claims he was arrested 13 times for car theft and drug trafficking before he was 21, and that he was a drug addict and an alcoholic from the age of 9. Dramatic stuff, but is it free from exaggeration? An alcoholic at 9? That is difficult to believe, but there is often a temptation to dramatise a past life of sin. This is especially so for those who went far along the road of wickedness and then have a spectacular conversion – or at any rate what is claimed to have been a conversion.

One great danger of crusades is that people are encouraged to believe that they are converted when that is not the case. At Braehead, the crusade website claims, “The number of people who made a first-time profession of faith, or a rededication, was well over 1000 over the three nights”. The whole business of counting converts in this way does not even allow time for them to show by their changed lives that they are indeed converted. A recent writer has described evangelists as “counting converts as so many trophies”. God’s glory is too easily forgotten.

Too often evangelists preach that all the sinner has to do is believe that Christ died for him in particular. That is what they mean by faith – to accept it as a fact just as you believe that Paris is the capital of France. Those who come to the front of the meeting – as these 1000 presumably did – are told to say a little prayer; they are then encouraged to believe that they are saved. But no one can really know that Christ died for them personally until they have actually trusted in Him. We are called to trust in Christ as the One who came into the world to save sinners. We are assured that He will turn away no one who comes to Him. And if we believe that we have been converted, we are to examine ourselves to see if we have the fruits – the evidences in our lives – which show that we are indeed converted.

Hill is a Pentecostal; he believes that people can still speak in tongues and perform miracles. He told his audience in Braehead: “I want my shadow to heal the sick”. He speaks of “a huge revival” which started when he was preaching in a Texas church. He is reported to have said that “the sensation of wind sweeping through the church and various manifestations of weeping and violent shaking among congregation of 1000 convinced him of his powers to convert. He claims millions have been saved at the church since

then.” Again this is dramatic stuff. But again, is it free from exaggeration?

One more point: he takes far too much to himself – assuming he has been correctly reported. No one has power to convert a sinner. That is the Holy Spirit’s work. The preacher is to declare the gospel, looking for the Spirit’s blessing. That is what we should be looking for – for ourselves and for others.

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## Made Willing to Obey

No strength of nature can suffice  
to serve the Lord aright;  
And what she has, she misapplies,  
for want of clearer light.

How long beneath the law I lay  
in bondage and distress!  
I toiled the precept to obey,  
but toiled without success.

Then to abstain from outward sin  
was more than I could do;  
Now, if I feel its power within,  
I feel I hate it too.

Then all my servile works were done  
a righteousness to raise:  
Now, freely chosen in the Son,  
I freely choose His ways.

“What shall I do,” was then the word,  
“that I may worthier grow?”  
“What shall I render to the Lord?”  
is my inquiry now.

To see the law by Christ fulfilled,  
and hear His pardoning voice,  
Changes a slave into a child,  
and duty into choice.

*John Newton*