

# The Young People's Magazine

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## In Court

If you were summoned to court, accused perhaps of a serious crime, what would you do? One of the first things that would strike you is surely to hire a good lawyer to represent you. You probably feel that you would not present your case particularly well before the judge; perhaps you think you could not make a good speech in any circumstances and you certainly do not know the ins and outs of the law. It would be dangerous to represent yourself in court; you need someone to help you. You need someone who knows the law well, who can speak well, who can put up a convincing case for you before those who have the responsibility of judging the case – the judge and jury, or perhaps just the judge alone.

But think of having to appear before God – which, sooner or later, is what must happen. Your immediate thought should be: How dare I, a guilty sinner, appear before the perfectly-holy God? David was very conscious of the fearful danger sinners are in before God. That was why he asked, “If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?” (Psalm 130:3). If God was to take to do with our sins – if He was to act against us because of them – none of us could stand before Him; we would be destroyed. Clearly we need someone to represent us before God.

We deserve that God would cast us away to a lost eternity, but the wonderful fact is that He has provided His own Son to represent sinners before Him. And all who take Christ as their representative before God are cleared of all the charges against them; they will never be punished for their sins. John, the disciple, knew how good it was to have Christ as his advocate. (An advocate is someone who stands beside someone to plead for him; indeed some lawyers in Scotland today are called advocates.) John had Christ as his advocate, which was why he said: “We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1).

Someone coming before a court may have a very poor case, yet he may be cleared of all the charges against him because he has a very good lawyer – who can speak well, who can pick out the weak points of the case against his client, and who can direct attention to the few points of law which favour

his client's case. But what of the strength of our case before God? It is not that we have a poor case; we have no case at all. There is nothing whatever that can be said in our favour. Yet, if Christ will represent us before God, we will most certainly be cleared.

How can that be? Because our Advocate will direct attention to what He Himself has done on behalf of sinners. Take Saul of Tarsus as an example. There was a time when he thought he had no need of an advocate to represent him before God. He told himself that, "touching the righteousness which is in the law", he was blameless. Certainly none of the Pharisees who knew him in his younger days could say anything against him; they no doubt thought him a very holy man – Saul was so careful in keeping the law of God. And Saul very much agreed with their opinion.

But Saul learned that if God would mark iniquities against him, he could not stand. And, very definitely, he was seriously guilty before God – not least because he persecuted the followers of Christ. He needed Christ Himself to represent him before God or he would be lost for ever. Saul was a sinner, a condemned sinner, who most definitely did not deserve God's favour. And that is true of every human being who has ever existed.

Saul was guilty, but Christ appeared on his behalf in what we might call the court of heaven. There was nothing to be said in Saul's favour, nothing that could take away from the seriousness of his position as a guilty sinner. Except this: Christ took Saul's place; Christ suffered for his sins; Christ took his punishment and died for him. So when, on the road to Damascus, Saul of Tarsus believed in Christ, he was forgiven – because of what Christ had done in this world on his behalf. All the charges against Saul were, so to speak, covered over. No action will ever be taken against him because of these charges. This was the case that his advocate made for Saul: he may go free because of what He, Christ, did as Saul's substitute.

Yet we must go further. God's law demands obedience from the sinner – perfect obedience. No one can get to heaven unless he has always kept every single commandment, without once coming short in the least degree. Yet no sinner, Saul or anyone else, can ever hope to obey God's law perfectly. So, unless he has Christ as his advocate, to represent him before God, no sinner can ever reach heaven. What a wonderful mercy that there is such an advocate, who can point to what He did in keeping the law, on behalf of sinners, while He was in this world!

Why is the apostle Paul, once known as Saul of Tarsus, in heaven today? Because Christ as his substitute kept the law perfectly in Paul's place, and because Christ as his advocate came before God to point to that perfect law-keeping on Paul's behalf. We too need such an advocate. And no other

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advocate has the right to come before God to represent sinners. We must engage Him urgently.

If you were to engage an advocate to represent you before some human court, you would have to pay for his services – and probably have to pay large fees, unless, if you cannot afford to pay, the government might pay them for you. But we must not think that we have to pay some fee to Christ. He acts for sinners absolutely freely. We must not think of offering Him some good work – like being more careful about our religious duties – as a fee for acting on our behalf in heaven. We must remember that our best works are thoroughly stained with sin; we need to be forgiven for them.

When one of the thieves beside Christ on the cross realised that he was a sinner, he felt his need of an advocate. So he asked Christ: “Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom?”. And did Christ refuse? Of course not. He has never refused to represent a sinner, and He never will.

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*For Younger Readers*

## A New Minister

Just a few weeks ago, a new minister came to this island. Four weeks before then, the people gathered in the Tarbert church to sign a call to him.

But what is a call to a minister? All the people who gathered in the church signed their name on a sheet of paper. They were saying that they wanted the minister to come and preach to them, and that they would come and listen to him.

A minister is a man whom God has called to go out and preach. Men should not become ministers because they decide they want to; they must be sure that God wants them to go and preach.

What is the minister to tell people? He is to bring them the message of the Bible. He is not to make up a message himself – what he thinks the people will find interesting. He must be sure that what he says is true.

But he can be sure that what the Bible says is perfectly true. He can never go wrong if he sticks to the message of the Bible.

What does the Bible tell us? It tells us that we are sinners, that we have not obeyed God. We have not done what He has told us to do. The Bible tells us that good people go to heaven and bad people to hell. And ministers must tell their people about these things.

But how can we become good? The Bible tells us that is why Jesus came into the world. He came to save sinners, to make them good. No one else can make us good. We must believe what the Bible tells us. So we must believe what the minister tells us, if he keeps to the Bible's message.

But Jesus Himself is speaking to us through the Bible. And we must believe Him. It is not only that we must believe what He is telling us, but that we must trust Him. We must trust Him because He died for sinners like us.

So, when people sign a call to a minister, they are saying many things. They are saying that they need someone to come and explain to them what the Bible says. They need to know that they are sinners; they need to know that Jesus came into the world to save sinners; and they need to know about believing in Jesus. They are saying that they want someone whom God has sent out as a minister, someone who will come to them as a messenger from God.

The people who come to the Tarbert church every Sabbath have their new minister now. I hope they remember that he has come to them as a messenger from God.

You may not be old enough to sign a call to a minister. But, whenever a minister comes to preach to you, you should listen very carefully. He may say many things you do not yet understand. But you should listen carefully because it is God who sends out ministers. God has sent that minister to speak to you.

Ask God to help you to understand what he says. And ask God to bring you to believe in Jesus.

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## **The Book of Ruth**

### **72. Proper Gospel Marriage**

*Rev Keith M Watkins*

Ruth 4:1,2. "Then went Boaz up to the gate, and sat him down there: and, behold, the kinsman of whom Boaz spake came by; unto whom he said, Ho, such a one! turn aside, sit down here. And he turned aside, and sat down. And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, Sit ye down here. And they sat down."

**G**od always intended marriage to picture the spiritual union of Christ and His Church. Christian husbands and wives aim to reflect this as much as they can: wives submitting to their husbands like the Church does to Christ,

and husbands loving their wives like Christ loved the Church (see Ephesians 5:24,25). Even the way they enter into marriage should picture the way Christ marries His people. This was certainly the case with Boaz and Ruth.

Boaz had come to love Ruth greatly. He could have taken an easy way for them to start living together, before they married. But he knew that would be wrong. Boaz was determined to marry Ruth in the proper way. That is why he went to the gate and called 10 responsible witnesses, so that all would be done legally and publicly, according to the laws of Israel. His great love for Ruth did not cause him to ignore the right and proper way of doing things. Quite the contrary. The more he loved Ruth, the more he was determined that they should enter into their marriage properly.

It is the same with the Lord Jesus Christ when He marries sinners to Himself in the everlasting covenant of grace. Let us “go forth . . . and behold king Solomon . . . in the day of His espousals” (Song of Solomon 3:11). This refers to King Jesus, the Solomon of the New Testament, for “a greater than Solomon is here”. And “the day of His espousals” is the day when He marries a sinner who has believed the gospel. On that day of love, all is done properly, fulfilling all the demands of righteousness.

The Son of God desired His bride with all the strength and fervency of everlasting love. Long had He waited for the marriage, even from before the foundation of the world: “Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love” (Jeremiah 31:3). His delights even then were with His people among the sons of men (see Proverbs 8:31). How He longed to have the Church as His own!

Hear Christ speak to His people of their wedding day: “And I will betroth thee unto Me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness, and in judgement, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto Me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the Lord” (Hosea 2:19,20). That day begins a spiritual union that will be *for ever*. It begins a marriage of *love* and *kindness* on both sides. It is truly a day of *mercies*, for the sinner could never be worthy of obtaining such a glorious Bridegroom. It is a marriage of *faithfulness*, for neither Christ nor the believer will ever break the covenant. And everyone married to the Lord will know Him for themselves. People rejoice on wedding days – but what a wedding day this is! When a sinner is united to Christ in the gospel, no wonder there is joy in the presence of the angels.

But wait. See what else Christ says about His wedding day: it will be in *righteousness* and in *judgement*, as well as in lovingkindness and in mercies. It is like Boaz and Ruth. Their wedding day was indeed a day of love, but everything was done according to the laws of Israel. And when Christ marries His people in love, everything is done according to the laws and the justice

of Israel's God. The Saviour's great love for His Church could not make Him forget the demands of righteousness nor the claims of justice.

There was only one proper, right way for Jesus to get His bride. That way would cost Him His blood. It was the hard way of toil, suffering and death, even the cursed death of the cross. If He was to have His bride in a righteous way, it was not possible for the cup of suffering to pass. Therefore He said: "Thy will be done". Divine justice could never approve of a marriage between God's holy Son and a fallen child of Adam without atonement for sin. Only Jesus was able to take away sin, by the sacrifice of Himself. His own precious blood was the price that divine justice demanded for the marriage to go ahead "in righteousness". Like Boaz with Ruth, the Saviour met the demands of law, so that His marriage to the Church would be right. "The Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28). "Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it" (Ephesians 5:25).

Boaz proceeded in a public way. He went to the gate, the most public place in Bethlehem. He called 10 witnesses from the elders of the town as representatives of the whole population. He was going to marry Ruth in a right way, and everyone was going to know that it was right. So also with the Saviour's marriage to His people.

As Paul told Agrippa, "The king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner" (Acts 26:26). Paul is referring to the gospel of Christ. All was done openly, before angels and men. The writing above His cross was in three languages, for all to read. Many, both friends and foes, came and went from the mount on which He died. They were witnesses when He was lifted up from the earth. And more than 500 people saw the risen Christ. The preaching of the gospel is a public declaration of Christ's offer of marriage to all nations: "Come to the marriage".

Boaz brought 10 men as witnesses. Let 10 angels be witnesses of Christ's marriage to sinners, and not one will raise an objection. Angels numbering "ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands" (Revelation 5:11) witnessed the Son of God becoming man and doing all that was legally required for a righteous union with His people. All was "seen of angels" (1 Timothy 3:16).

Christ's blood-bought bride is herself made a witness of the righteous nature of her union with Christ. Her eyes are opened to see God's justice demanding her condemnation on account of her sins. She sees how unfit she is to marry God's Son. But in the gospel she sees what He has done Himself to take away her guilt, and to make her an acceptable bride. Thus a great

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multitude that no man can number are made witnesses of the righteousness of gospel salvation.

So it was not only Boaz who was set on marrying his bride properly, legally and publicly. The same was true of Christ. This means that once you are married to Christ, that marriage will never be overturned. It is for ever. It meets all the claims of law and justice. That has been declared publicly. Get Christ for your Bridegroom and you will never lose Him. To all eternity no objection can be raised against your union to Him.

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## Sanderson and Little Alice

Richard, a poor man in Rochdale, lay dying. John Ashworth had come to read the Bible with him and pray. A dog called Fox started howling in the street below. Jane, a relation of the ill man, jumped up. "When that dog shouts," she cried, "death is sure to follow." She was sure that Richard would die very quickly. It was just a superstition, but she believed it.

Ashworth asked about the dog. "It belongs to Sanderson," Jane told him, "a man that neither believes in heaven nor hell, God nor devil." And she rambled on foolishly about people dying soon after Fox howled in the street.

Sanderson was just 35, but he did not enjoy good health. Not long afterwards, he became unable to climb the stairs in his house. Philip Powles, an old shoemaker, lived near Sanderson. He wanted to do something for the good of his neighbour's soul but did not dare to go to visit him himself. Instead, he asked Mr Britton, a zealous minister in the town, to go. Britton went, and told Mrs Sanderson that he had come to talk with her husband about his soul.

"I am very sorry you have called on such an errand," she told him, "for I am sure my husband will not see you, and it would very much disturb him if he knew you were in the house."

"I am come purposely to disturb him," the minister replied, "for he had better be disturbed here than damned hereafter. If God, in His mercy, does not disturb him, he will be lost for ever. Just go upstairs, please, and ask if I may see him."

Mrs Sanderson did not need to go upstairs to know what her husband's answer would be. But, as the minister persisted, she felt obliged to go. Not wanting to relay his message, she spent a little while tidying in the bedroom. Soon Sanderson asked whose voice he had heard downstairs. "A gentleman of the name of Britton," she told him, "whom Philip Powles asked to call and see you. I think he is the minister of Philip's church." Back came the very

definite response: "Tell him that I shall not see him, and when I need him or any other parson, I will let them know".

Another minister thought Britton was too soft and decided to visit Sanderson himself. Mrs Sanderson told him that she had very definite instructions not to allow any minister to go upstairs to her husband. But he insisted: "Well, but I have come to see him and intend to see him. And if you dare not ask permission, I will go up at once and take all the consequences".

But before the minister could go any farther, he heard a voice from the top of the stairs warning that "if any parson dared to enter his room, he would smash his brains out with the poker". Sanderson also instructed his wife to call a policeman to send the minister away. No policeman was needed; the minister went away much less sure of his previous opinion of his colleague's softness.

Philip the shoemaker was still very concerned about his neighbour's soul, so he asked Ashworth to visit him. But Ashworth realised that a head-on approach would not succeed. After thinking the matter over for a day or two, he decided to make use of Alice, a girl who attended a Sabbath school and often went to see Sanderson. He promised Alice a present if she would learn a poem and repeat it to her friend. It began:

"When life's tempestuous storms are o'er,  
How calm he meets the friendly shore,  
Who died on earth to sin!  
Such peace on piety attends  
That, where the sinner's pleasure ends,  
The good man's joys begin."

Within two days Alice had learned the four verses of the poem. She went upstairs to Sanderson's room and found him rocking himself in a chair with his feet on a little footstool and his back to the window. She offered to repeat the poem to him. He agreed. He took her book, telling her: "Now then be very careful and say it well; mind you do not miss one word". When she finished he just said quietly: "That will do; you may go down and take Fox with you. I want to have no company for the present." Alice told Ashworth: "He put the book on his face, and I think he cried".

The next day, Sanderson noticed a tract lying on a chair. He picked it up and began to read it. The tract told the story of a man in his street, a man whom he had known. Sanderson already knew some of the details in the tract, but he was now anxious to know more. He asked his wife where the tract had come from. She told him that Ashworth had been giving them out and she thought it would interest him.

"Did John Ashworth ask you to place the tract in my room?" he enquired.

“He did; he often asked about you and says he would like to come and talk politics with you.”

“Well, go and tell him that if he can come this evening and tell me who wrote the tract, and talk politics as you say, I shall be glad of his company.”

Ashworth was glad to come. For six evenings he came and had long, interesting conversations about politics with Sanderson. But, just as he was leaving that sixth evening, Sanderson looked straight at him and asked, “Mr Ashworth, how is it that you never speak to me about my soul?”

“Why, Sanderson, have you got a soul?” was the answer from his visitor, who was anxious not to rush too soon into spiritual subjects – although to get round to the needs of Sanderson’s soul was the whole purpose of his visits.

Sanderson was too moved to reply. He just pointed to the chair from which Ashworth had risen. Clearly he wanted another conversation, about a more serious subject. The poem and the tract, he at last told Ashworth, “have crushed me to dust. I have held out as long as I can. Whatever must I do?”

Ashworth too was moved, and several minutes passed before he was able to speak. Then he told him, “Thank God, Sanderson, that question has not come too late. There is an answer, and there is just one.” He referred to Sanderson’s refusal to believe the teachings of the Bible, which he had once shared. “It is a gloomy, blighting, blasting, withering curse,” he said, “and it makes its dupe a miserable living lie and sinks him lower than the brute”. He pointed to the wonders of God’s creation and then spoke of how, in the Bible, “we find that reconciliation, union and communion with God are absolutely necessary to secure the happiness of man. Man, forsaking God, lost peace; man must be brought back to God or remain miserable. Our redemption through Christ opens the way, and this is the answer to your question: ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved’.”

Sanderson was deeply disturbed, and for several days he felt tormented by a guilty conscience. He wrestled earnestly in prayer for the pardon of his sins. At last, as he cried: “O God, for Christ’s sake, blot out my iniquities and save my poor, guilty soul,” he felt that his prayers were answered and he burst out in praise and thanksgiving to God.

Everybody heard about the change. His old friends thought he had gone mad, but the truth of the matter was that he was no longer mad. He had found true wisdom, which only God can give. He apologised to the two ministers and very much enjoyed the time he spent in the company of God’s people, including his neighbour Philip. As his health improved, he was able to go to church and very much appreciated what he heard. He now enjoyed reading the Bible and learned by heart many passages in the New Testament.

He tried to reverse the harm he had done in earlier days, speaking to all kinds of people about the power of saving grace. He often wished that he had been converted when he was young so that he might have had the pleasure of living a godly life and of doing something in the service of God. Now, although he had no fear of death, he did desire to live longer so that he might do some good.

But it was not to be. He caught a bad cold and soon he was so unwell that he could not leave his bed. One Sabbath morning, Ashworth was on his way to take services at Littleborough. For what he felt would be the last time, he called on Sanderson. He was weak, propped up in bed by several pillows. He smiled feebly to Ashworth and put out his sweaty hand. He then quoted three lines of the poem Alice had recited to him:

“See smiling patience smooths my brow,  
See the kind angels waiting now  
To waft my soul on high.”

He then made a final request to Ashworth: “Will you let me find you a text? And if you do not preach from it today, preach from it as soon as you can.” What was the text? “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 Timothy 1:15). And Sanderson was very anxious that his friend would not leave out the last words of the verse: “Of whom I am chief”. They were words which had been proved true in his own experience, and he was anxious that others also would find them so. Within a few more hours Sanderson's soul was wafted to heaven by the angels; he was one more of the sinners whom Christ Jesus came into the world to save.

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## **James Kidd of Aberdeen**

### **5. The Man**

*Rev D W B Somerset*

This is the final part of a paper given at this year's Youth Conference. In the fourth section, we saw some of the conflicts Kidd was involved in as a minister in Aberdeen.

**J**ames Kidd was probably the most famous man in Aberdeen in his day, and his unpredictable behaviour was a source of continual interest and amusement to the people of the city. In many things, it would be wrong to try to imitate him, but the Lord made use of his eccentricities to further the work of the gospel in Aberdeen. It has to be remembered, however, that he was also a very godly man, and his godliness was very necessary for the work which he had been called to do. He was the instrument whom the Lord

had chosen to bring the gospel to the city after a long period of deadness, and God's instruments must first be "sanctified and meet for the Master's use" (2 Timothy 2:21). Kidd had been prepared for his work in Aberdeen by the hardships and sufferings which he had endured in Ireland and America. The Holy Spirit used these to humble him and to make him more dependent on God – and to teach him to seek happiness, not in this world, but in eternity and in Christ.

We have already seen the severe trial that he experienced when his family came across from America to join him; his little three-year-old daughter was washed overboard in a storm and drowned. Like all the Lord's people, however, his trials did not end there, but continued all his days. In his later years in Aberdeen he was troubled with some scandal in his family. We are not told what it was, but it was evidently a grief to him, and his enemies made use of it in their attacks against him. In all these things, however, there are divine purposes, and for Kidd one of these purposes was to make him ready to sympathise with those who were suffering similar trials. The apostle Paul says that God "comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God" (2 Corinthians 1:4).

Kidd was a man of prayer and of study. For most of his life, until his old age, he would rise at 3 am, light his fire and begin to pray. Then he would read: first the Scriptures and then other books. He read widely, but he had his favourites, and his great favourite was the Puritan John Owen. He read Owen's work on *Communion with God* every month, his work on *The Person and Glory of Christ* every three months, and his work on *The Holy Spirit* every year. Kidd did not write much himself, but he did publish a number of sermons and various pamphlets on the controversies that cropped up during the course of his life. He also wrote two books on perhaps the two most profound theological subjects of all. In 1815 he published a work on the doctrine of *The Trinity*, and in 1822 one on *The Eternal Sonship of Christ*.

Every afternoon Kidd would go out visiting, and in this way he studied life. He was a well-known figure walking through the streets of Aberdeen. He was about 5 foot 10 inches tall, and very broad and strong. He was always kind to the poor and ready to assist people in trouble. There were no police in those days; if he saw any injustice, he was inclined to take the law into his own hands. He had a sharp tongue against sin and, if that was not enough, he could also make effective use of his umbrella. He loved children, and kept his waistcoat pockets full of sweets and raisins. With every sweet he would place his hands upon the child's head and say: "God bless you; be good; be all good, my children". Sometimes boys would run on ahead

hoping for a second sweet and blessing, but that was a risky thing to do. "Go away, you rogue," he told one whom he recognised; "you are not Benjamin, to get a double portion."

He loved singing and had a loud voice, but he was utterly unmusical. The sound that he made was likened to "the intermittent and distant mutterings of thunder". Sometimes, at the numerous prayer meetings he held throughout the city, he had to prevent himself, and on these occasions the tune "Blackburn" had to do duty for every singing. It irritated him when he saw people who were silent during the psalms, and on one occasion he took the arm of an old lady near him, and shouted into her ear, "Sing, sing; you old sinner!"

In those days there were still public executions. Whenever this happened, Kidd would make a special effort to visit the prisoner and speak to him of Christ. Generally he would accompany the prisoner onto the scaffold, and on one occasion when he thought the hangman was acting roughly, Kidd rebuked him and gently tied the rope round the prisoner's neck himself.

Kidd kept on preaching and lecturing to the very end of his life. He was taken ill on Friday, 19 December 1834, and on the Sabbath the doctor would not let him preach. On the Monday he stayed in bed "to please the doctor", but on Tuesday he insisted on giving a lecture to his students at Marischal College. On his return home he collapsed, and he died the next day, 24 December 1834, aged 73. His tomb, in St Nicholas churchyard, is now much in need of repair.

When death came, Kidd was ready for it. In November he had written to a friend, "I have laid aside all study and all books but my Bible". A few months earlier he had recorded in his Diary: "May 1834. This day, and at this time, I revolve in my mind 33 years of my ministry. And I know not where to begin, where to pause, or where to stop, nor hardly what to say. Have I been faithful? Not so much as I ought to have been. Have I been successful? God only knows. During all the time, sin has had a very strong hold, and yet I am not without some gleams of grace. I must at present, as when I began, leave the matter in Christ's hand. O my Lord, in mercy help and pity me and my flock. I am conscious of much sin in conduct, but not error in doctrine. I have to lament many grievous falls, and yet I must say I have never been altogether deserted. My poor sinful heart has betrayed me many a time, and my God has still spared me and carried me through. Were I called into judgement I must condemn myself, but I trust I would not let Christ go. Every view I get of Him, by faith, supports me more and more – so precious is Christ to the downcast soul. Let me be ever near Him, ever be with Him, in union and communion. Amen."

*For Junior Readers*

## The Fifth of November

I am sure you are familiar with the celebrations that take place on the fifth of November each year. Although most people today probably do not even think about the reason for them, these bonfires and fireworks are actually based in history, in our Protestant heritage. They commemorate what happened on 5 November 1605, almost 400 years ago.

A group of Roman Catholic conspirators hatched the “Gunpowder Plot”. These men hired a cellar underneath the House of Lords and secretly filled it with barrels of gunpowder. On the fifth of November, which was the day set for the opening of parliament that year, they intended to set fire to the gunpowder and blow up the palace of Westminster. In this way they planned to kill the Protestant king, James I, his government ministers and the members of the House of Lords. They hoped that such a terrible event would lead to a great uprising of English Roman Catholics and to a general revolt which would bring the country under Roman Catholic rule once more.

However, in God’s kind providence, an anonymous letter warned of what was planned; it betrayed the conspirators. The letter led to the vaults beneath the House of Lords being searched on the fourth of November. The gunpowder was discovered and Guy Fawkes, one of the conspirators – equipped with tinder box and matches – was arrested.

So, in this way the treasonous plot was discovered just in time. King James I acknowledged the Lord’s hand in the deliverance and passed a law to set aside the fifth of November as a day of thanksgiving. Special services were held in the churches, and our Puritan forefathers made it a special time of thanksgiving. This Act remained in force right up until 1859!

Although all these centuries have passed, we surely should not forget how God has worked in our history. Nor should we forget how He has shielded our country from many enemies and how He made it a land of the gospel. We should say with the Psalmist in Psalm 44:

“O God we with our ears have heard,  
our fathers have us told,  
What works Thou in their days hadst done,  
even in the days of old. . . .

But from our foes Thou hast us saved,  
our haters put to shame.  
In God we all the day do boast,  
and ever praise Thy name.”

*J van Kralingen*

## The Queen of Sheba

*C H Spurgeon*

This article is abridged from a chapter in Spurgeon's book *A Good Start*.

Queens have many duties, but the Queen of Sheba did not consider it a waste of valuable time to journey to Solomon's kingdom. How many people offer the vain excuse that they cannot pay due attention to the religion of Jesus Christ for lack of time! They have a large family, they say, or a difficult business to manage. This woman rebukes them; she threw off the cares of state to take a long journey so that she might listen to Solomon.

Her royal court was, no doubt, already stored with wisdom. The princes of such countries always gathered about them a band of wise men. But the Queen of Sheba was not content with what she knew already. She was determined to search after the divine wisdom she had heard about. If you dream that human wisdom can give sufficient light, without receiving the brighter beams of revelation, this queen rebukes you. As the sun outshines a candle, the wisdom of Jesus Christ is greater than all human knowledge. He who will not come to the fountain which brims with wisdom, but trusts to his own leaking cisterns, shall wake up too late to find himself a fool.

Consider too that the queen came from a very great distance to hear the wisdom of Solomon. The journey on the back of a camel from Arabia, or from Ethiopia, whichever country it may have been, was long and dangerous. Coming, as Matthew says, "from the uttermost parts of the earth", there doubtless were mountains to be climbed and deserts to be crossed. But none of these difficulties could keep her back. She hears of wisdom, and wisdom she will have. So she boldly ventures on the journey with her many followers, no matter how far she may have to travel. Very many have the gospel brought to their doors and will not go to listen to it. The Queen of Sheba, toiling across the desert shall rise up in judgement against those who neglect the great salvation and treat it as nothing that Jesus should die.

Do not forget that this woman had a religion already – probably one of the older forms of idolatry, perhaps the worship of the sun. Many people argue: "Would you have me change my religion?" Yes, I would, if your religion is false. A religion which does not renew a man's character and make him holy – which does not change his confidence and make him rest upon Christ – is a religion of no value, and the sooner he gives it up the better. Because my mother or my grandmother happened to be blind, why am I to be blind too if there is sight to be had? Remember, each soul enters through the gate of life alone, and through the iron gate of death it departs alone. Everyone should search earnestly, away from all the rest of the world, to know what the truth

is. And knowing it, it is his duty to come out on the Lord's side. Yes, we would have you pay attention to the things of God, even though you should have been brought up in other another religion and should have followed it honestly. Prove the spirits, whether they be of God. If your soul has been deceived, there is yet time to be set right. God help you to find out the truth!

This woman came a long distance, making it a very expensive journey. She came with many camels bearing spices and very much gold and precious stones. She looked on the treasures of her kingdom as valuable only because they would admit her into the presence of Solomon. Now, our Lord Jesus Christ asks nothing of us except our hearts. He does not sell the truth but gives it freely. And what if we will not have it? Shall we not be utterly inexcusable when this heathen queen shall rise up and declare that she gave her rubies and her pearls, her spices and her camels to King Solomon so that she might learn his human wisdom? The gospel cries, "He that hath no money . . . buy wine and milk without money and without price". If you have refused the invitation of Christ's gospel, you may well tremble at the thought that the Queen of Sheba shall rise up in judgement against you.

Note that she had received no invitation from King Solomon. You have been bidden to come to Christ. "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come." The Bible is God's written invitation, and you may search it if you will. Therefore if you will not come to King Jesus when God's providence brings the gospel to your very gates, you shall be condemned indeed by the Queen of Sheba. We bid the careless soul think of the Son of God; she went that distance to see a son of man. She journeyed all that way to see one who was wise himself but had power to tell her only a very small portion of his wisdom; while we invite the sinner to come to One who is made of God unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. She went to hear a man who had wisdom; we bid you come to One who *is* wisdom.

Do you talk of the royalty of Solomon? We invite you to a greater King, who is Lord of heaven and earth and hell. Do you speak of Solomon's riches? We tell you of One who has unspeakable riches of grace and glory. True, she *might* gain by her journey, but no soul ever traded with King Jesus without being at once enriched. If he came empty-handed, poor, feeble, naked and sinful to receive from Him His great salvation, he was never sent away empty.

Let us observe that this queen came in person. She did not send an ambassador to search into the matter. The Duke of Wellington once rebuked an officer for railing against the Bible, asking him if he had ever read it. When the officer frankly confessed he had not, he showed him how mean it was to find fault with something he did not understand. Most of those who object to the religion of Christ have never investigated it. I am sure no man

could ever think or speak against the Saviour who had an intelligent idea of who He is, and of how gracious His work is.

The Queen went to Solomon himself. The way to learn the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ is to go to *Him*. "She told him all that was in her heart." Tell the Lord all that is in your heart – your doubts, your fears and your hardness of heart; confess it all. Do not wait because your heart is vile – it is viler than you think – but go with it just as it is and tell Jesus all.

She asked Solomon her hard questions. I do not know what they were, and I do not particularly care. But I know, if you come to Christ, you will ask Him this hard question: "How can God forgive sin and yet punish it?" Jesus will point you to His wounded hands and feet. You will ask, "How can a sinful creature be accepted by a holy God?" He will tell you of His righteousness – how, covered with the Redeemer's imputed righteousness, a sinful soul is as acceptable before the Lord as though it had never sinned. You will ask, "How can a weak soul overcome the world, the flesh and the devil?" And Jesus will answer, "My grace is sufficient for thee; My strength shall be perfect in thy weakness". So all the knotty questions will be answered.

This good woman listened carefully to what Solomon told her. If you tell Christ your failings, He will tell you His merit; if you tell Him your weakness, He will tell you His strength; if you tell Him your distance from God, He will tell you His nearness to God; if you show Him how hard your heart is, He will tell you how His heart was broken so that sinners might live. Do not be afraid; only trust in Him, and He will reveal these things to you.

She then gave to Solomon from her treasures. And so souls that know the beauty of Christ give Him all they have. We think our love to be a very poor thing, but He does not think so. What are we doing for Christ? You do not have many spices, but bring what you have – your silent prayers, your holy life, the words you sometimes speak for Christ. You train your children, feed His poor, clothe the naked, visit the sick, comfort His mourners, restore backsliders. All these shall be like camels laden with spices, an acceptable gift to the Most High.

Then Solomon made her a present from his royal bounty. She lost nothing. She gave all she had, and Solomon gave her as much again. We give Him pence and He gives us pounds; we give Him years of labour and He gives us an eternity of rest; we give Him days of patient endurance and He gives us ages of joyous honour. "I reckon that the sufferings of this present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." What a King is the Saviour, who will not let His people have one ungratified wish, if it is a good one! The Lord says, "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it". "According to your faith be it unto you."

## The Barren Fig Tree

Within a vineyard's sunny bound  
An ample fig tree shelter found,  
    Enjoying sun and showers.  
The boughs were graceful to the view,  
With spreading leaves of deep-green hue,  
    And gaily blushing flowers.  
When round the vintage season came,  
This blooming fig was still the same,  
    As promising and fair;  
But though the leaves were broad and green  
No precious fruit was to be seen,  
    Because no fruit was there.  
"For three long years", the master cried,  
"Fruit on this tree to find I've tried,  
    But all in vain my toil;  
Ungrateful tree, the axe's blow  
Shall lay thy leafy honours low.  
    Why cumberst thou the soil?"  
"Ah, let it stand just one year more,"  
The dresser said, "till all my store  
    Of rural arts I've shown:  
About the massy roots I'll dig;  
And if it bear, we've gained the fig.  
    If not, then cut it down."  
How many years hast thou, my heart,  
Acted the barren fig-tree's part,  
    Leafy, and fresh, and fair,  
Enjoying heavenly dews of grace,  
And sunny smiles from God's own face?  
    But where the fruit? Ah where?  
How often must the Lord have prayed  
That still my day might be delayed,  
    Till all due means were tried!  
Afflictions, mercies, health, and pain,  
How long shall these be all in vain  
    To teach this heart of pride!  
Learn, O my soul, what God demands  
Is not a faith like barren sands,  
    But fruit of heavenly hue.  
By this we prove that Christ we know,  
If in His holy steps we go:  
    Faith works by love, if true.

*R M M'Cheyne*

# Looking Around Us

## Spirituality

The Scottish Episcopal Church has appointed a new Bishop of Argyll and the Isles, based in Oban. He has come to a truly beautiful part of the world, and he obviously appreciates it. In a newspaper interview he declares his firm belief that “the haunting beauty of Argyll’s open spaces makes it easier for people to get in touch with their spirituality” – which is a strange idea for someone whom you would expect to take his religion from the Bible.

*Spirituality* has become a very common word, but it rather lacks definite meaning. As one modern writer points out, it covers all kinds of things that “an earlier generation of Christians . . . would have dismissed as error, or even as paganism or heathenism”. And he is right.

Looking over the beautiful scenery in Argyll, or in any other part of the world, we should certainly be very conscious of the work of our Creator – and to see in it something of His power and majesty. To that extent, we should find it more difficult to forget God in such places.

But our own spirituality? And what is it worth? Indeed, unless God the Holy Spirit has changed our hearts, we have only some form of natural religion, and that is dangerous. We will not have right ideas about God or about ourselves; we will not really understand how we should live to the glory of God. But if the Holy Spirit will bring us through the new birth, we will have a new nature and we will begin to think in a truly spiritual way. Only then will we have anything which should be described as spirituality, or what “an earlier generation of Christians” would have described as spiritual-mindedness.

Those who are spiritually-minded no longer think as worldly people do. They are thoroughly influenced by what the Bible teaches. They have begun to appreciate God’s Word. They have begun to love God Himself and to value the way of salvation which He has provided in Christ Jesus. And this is to be seen in the way they live – they live holy lives though not perfectly so. They make use of the good things of this life, but they do not set their hearts on them. They know that they are not going to live here always, so they are looking forward to a better world – a world where they will be perfect, where they will no longer sin, and where they will indeed love God with all their hearts.

The more spiritual we are the better. But let us be sure that it is the spirituality described in the Bible.