

The Young People's Magazine

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Hope for the Future

Not so very many years ago, Japan's economy was the envy of almost the whole world. Not any longer. Amid the changes forced on the country by the problems of the early 1990s, many people are finding it difficult to adapt. Many of them find it impossible to obtain the kind of work they really want. Ijiri, for instance, is 25. He graduated from a polytechnic college as an environmental-systems engineer. After searching for six months for a job in line with his qualifications, he had to give up and take a position as a security guard. "People like me," he commented gloomily, "who aren't particularly talented at anything, are happier with the old system."

Ijiri has work, but obviously has little hope for the future. As others forge ahead in high-powered jobs, he complains: "I don't know if I'll ever earn enough to support a family. We are most definitely headed the wrong way." Not for him the attitude of his father's generation, who believed that tomorrow would always be better than today. Increasingly in Japan, some are doing very well and others are falling behind. Mesahiro Yamada, a professor at a Tokyo university, believes the real problem is not the gap between the wealth of rich and poor but what he calls the "hope disparity" between them.

And where can we find hope in a difficult world? No doubt, success in life brings with it hope for the future. You need not be surprised if people in good health, with well-paying jobs and lots of friends, are hopeful. But you ought to ask if this kind of hopefulness looks far enough into the future. Does it take account of the eternity that lies beyond this life? For death is certain, and we must exist for ever in either heaven or hell.

That was what the rich farmer, whom Christ spoke about, left out of account. He had reaped a wonderful harvest. It is unlikely he had ever seen the like before. All the grain that he and his workers had brought in from the fields must have been piled up in huge heaps. How hopeful the future was! How much enjoyment he would have! In the years to come he could take life much easier. He told himself: "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry". Certainly, some planning and effort were called for first. He would have to pull down his barns and

build bigger ones. But then he could relax and enjoy himself thoroughly. He would have no worries. The future was unbelievably bright.

And death was far away in the future. Or so he assumed. He could afford, he thought, to go on and enjoy life for a long time to come; he would have plenty time somewhere in the distant future to prepare for eternity – if the thought of eternity occurred to him at all.

But how wrong he was! That very day God spoke to him. The farmer must have been stunned to hear the words: “Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?” He now had no days left in this life; he must go straight into eternity. No time to enjoy his new-found riches! No time to take his ease! No time to eat, drink and be merry! But far more seriously, very little time – perhaps no time at all – to prepare for eternity! No wonder God called him a fool. Nothing can be more foolish than to neglect your soul – to put off preparing for eternity till some day far away in the future. The day you are promising yourself may never come. In the end, unless you grasp your present opportunities, you may have no time to prepare to die.

It is very easy to feel hopeful when all seems to be going well. But is this kind of hopefulness robust enough to survive unemployment, illness and disability? Will you still feel brightly confident if life becomes uncertain, your friends melt away, and your money unexpectedly dries up? Yes, it may be a loud call to seek the Lord – a call to which you would do well to respond with the words: “Draw me, we will run after Thee” (Song of Solomon 1:4). But how much better to seek the Lord now, before “the evil days come”. It is good, before the evil days of trouble come your way, to know your way to the throne of grace. If you are a true believer – it will, in a sense, be natural for you to go to God in prayer when trouble meets you. And what a blessing to be able to do so!

Did Ijiri know to pray to the true God when he experienced such difficulty in finding work? Does he pray now when the future appears so dismal, in what seems to be a dead-end, low-paying job? In fact, in the four-page article about Japan, in *Time* magazine, nothing whatever is said about religion. That may not really be surprising. For one thing, the media of the Western world do not rank religion very highly as a factor in anyone's life. In any case, Japan is not a country where personal religion rates at all highly. Indeed, although 80% of its people claim to believe in Shintoism, a religion in which reverence for dead ancestors plays a large part, 84% of Japanese profess to have no personal religion. Not many more than 2% claim to follow *any* form of Christianity. We should be very thankful for our privileges – that we at least know *about* the way of salvation. But how serious for us if, knowing

about the way to heaven, we do not set out on it! How serious if we do not believe on Jesus Christ, the Saviour whom God has appointed for sinners like us! There can be no hope for unbelievers in a lost eternity. And, even in this life, they have no right to be optimistic about the future.

A life without religion is not natural. Perhaps never before in human history have so many persuaded themselves to assume that there is no God. Man was created to glorify God – that is, the true God – not any of the gods worshipped in the almost endless variety of false religions in the world, gods who have no real existence. It should be a tremendous wonder to us that God has revealed Himself to us sinners – that, though we have rebelled against Him, He has shown us in the Bible how we may return.

This should be amazingly hopeful in a difficult world. But we ought to be in no doubt that, sooner or later, trouble will come our way. Apart from God's power, especially in the face of death, everything will then appear very bleak. How desperate Jeremiah's position was when Jerusalem was invaded by the Babylonian army! The temple was burnt down; the city was destroyed; many of his fellow countrymen were led away into exile in far-off Babylon. The outlook must have seemed fearfully bleak for everyone.

Of course, Jeremiah felt the awfulness of his position. Yet he knew that God was in control. And when he could have no hope in anything or anyone else, he could still say, "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in Him" (Lamentations 3:24). Even in the bleakness of his situation, there was still a glimmer of hope. Perhaps we should say there was a bright ray of hope. Jeremiah knew that God had promised to take care of him, and he trusted God always to do so. In particular, whatever might happen in this life, God would bring him to heaven at the end of his days. And that would be the end of all his troubles. He was quite sure that "though [God] cause grief, yet will He have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies" (v 32). Jeremiah had indeed good reason to be hopeful.

It is vitally important that we do not allow the things of this life – necessary though they may be – to get too high a place in our minds. Yes, we must be conscientious in carrying out all our duties, at work, in studying, or whatever. But if we are to have good reason to be hopeful in this life, and if are to have any reason to be hopeful about the eternity that lies beyond, we must be followers of Christ. Even if we are not particularly talented, there is no reason to feel hopeless about the future. Let us look to Christ, and we need never despair. He is the Good Shepherd, and He will lead His followers safely through this life and at last bring them into heaven. Those, and only those, who believe in Christ have every reason to be hopeful as they face the future, however uncertain it seems. He will never leave them to themselves.

God the Father

3. A Free Choice

Rev J R Tallach

Last month's article looked at the third of four points: God the Father in relation to the Children of Israel. Three articles will be needed to cover this last point.

The fourth way in which we read of God the Father is His adopting sinners into His family and making them His children. In his book, *Knowing God*, J I Packer asks: What is a Christian? He answers, "The question can be answered in many ways, but the richest answer I know is that a Christian is one who has God for his Father".

This adoption is first of all a matter of free grace, the choice of God. A few weeks ago, in Portree in the Isle of Skye, I met someone I know. He was carrying a little Chinese girl in his arms. He and his wife already had several children but they had heard of how girl babies are often unwanted in China, where the size of families has been restricted by Government decree. Because of this decree, many female infants end up in orphanages. This man and his wife went over to China, chose one particular orphanage, and from that orphanage selected this particular little girl. After the formalities had been completed she was brought to Skye.

There she was, far from her native home, culture, prospects – or lack of them, perhaps – in China, and was now part of a family in Scotland, with all the present care and future prospects which that suggested. No one had put pressure on those parents to take any interest in the plight of female infants in China. They had not been forced to choose any particular orphanage, and in that orphanage they had not been forced to choose any particular child. She was their free choice.

When man fell in the Garden of Eden, he became a rebel against God and lost all claim on His care and protection; he had wilfully cast it off, like the prodigal son when he left home. Indeed man was now under the wrath and curse of God because of his sin. God does according to His own will and no one says to Him, "What doest thou?" He was under no constraint to save any of Adam's fallen race. Nor was He under any compulsion to choose one sinner more than another out of that fallen people. In every case, it was all entirely of grace.

Perhaps the natural family of the couple who adopted the Chinese girl was all boys and they wanted a girl. No doubt adoption in general fills some felt need in the parents' lives. But it is not so when God chooses. He is entirely self-sufficient; He lacks nothing. Perhaps the little girl was especially

attractive, but as sinners we possess no attractiveness to God. Indeed our sins make us offensive to a holy God. All the grace, all the drawing, is on God's side. It is this Father who makes those who are children of wrath, who deserve a lost eternity, to become sons of God and heirs of glory. John says, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us, that we should be called the sons of God!" Notice the word *bestow*, from above, a sovereign gift.

Again Paul, speaking of "the saints at Ephesus and the faithful in Christ Jesus, says, "According as [God] hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love; having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace" (Ephesians 1:4-6). This is not merely part of the good things coming down from God as Creator – life and strength and all things from Him in whom we live and move and have our being. This is not the shadow and the promise of things to come, as Israel's privileges were. But "redemption", "forgiveness of sins", "holiness", "adoption", a heavenly "inheritance" – in short, "all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ". Adoption into the family of God is by grace.

Another fundamental feature of this adoption is that it is entirely by Jesus Christ. It is, first of all, only by Christ that we have a knowledge of the Father. When Philip asked to be shown the Father, the Lord Jesus told him: "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). Again He said, "Neither knoweth any man the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him" (Matthew 11:27).

In the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus gave His disciples the Lord's Prayer, He taught them both their duty to pray and what they were to say in drawing near their Father. They were to pray from the heart in secret, and their Father who sees in secret would reward them openly. There was no need for vain repetitions such as the heathen indulged in, "for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask Him" (Matthew 6:6). Their Father would forgive them their sins if they were ready to forgive others their sins against them. They were to depend on Him who fed the birds of the air and so beautifully clothed the flowers of the field. They were to ask their Father for good things, expecting an answer in peace. As the disciples would not give their sons a stone instead of bread, "how much more shall you Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?"

Jesus revealed to the woman of Samaria that the spiritual nature of the Father demanded spiritual worship. Jesus made plain to the publicans and sinners who drew near to hear Him that the Father is waiting to be gracious;

He told them the parable of the Prodigal Son and the welcome he received from his father on his return (Luke 15). Jesus comforted His disciples in view of His departure by telling them that His Father's house had many mansions, that He was going to prepare a place for them there and that He would come again to take them to be with Him in His Father's house. After His resurrection he told Mary Magdalene, "Go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God" (John 20:17). It is from Jesus alone that we learn of the Father.

Equally it is through Jesus alone that we may come to the Father. He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by Me" (Jn 14:6). In Ephesians we find that the standing of the adopted children of God is in Christ; they have redemption through His blood; and in Christ they have an inheritance. Their adoption as children is said to be entirely "by Jesus Christ", "according to the good pleasure of [God's] will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made [them] accepted in the Beloved". And "as many as received [Christ], to them gave He power to become the sons of God".

George Hepburn

2. Narrow Escapes

This is the second of two articles about a man who had been an informer to the new minister (the curate) in Sorn, in Ayrshire. For payment, he used to come with information about the persecuted Covenanters. But at one of their open-air conventicles he was convicted of his sins and later he was brought to Christ.

Eventually the curate in Sorn noticed that Hepburn had not come to his manse for a long time and decided to find out what was wrong. One April day, the curate set out to pay Hepburn a visit. As he walked over the moor, he found Hepburn working among his sheep. Probably many of that year's lambs had already been born; so the shepherd was specially busy. The curate questioned him about the long time since he had brought him any information about the Covenanters, but Hepburn could very reasonably tell the curate how busy he was with his sheep at that time of year.

In fact, the curate was already suspicious that his informer had become a Covenanter himself. His suspicions would have been confirmed if he had noticed, lying open on the ground, the Bible which Hepburn had been reading when the curate came in sight. To be caught with a Bible was highly dangerous at that time; soldiers and others acting for the government might very readily assume that a Bible-reader was a Covenanter and haul him off

to prison at once or even shoot him on the spot. But the curate did not notice Hepburn's Bible; he just gave his former informer strict orders to be more regular in coming to see him in the future and then went his way.

Hepburn was longing for another opportunity to attend a conventicle so that he could once more listen to the gospel; one thing was sure, he would hear nothing in a sermon in Sorn church that would feed his soul. He was aware too that the Covenanters would be wary of him; many other informers had pretended to have had a change of mind and had come to various meetings, but only to betray the people to their persecutors. Yet, although he realised that it would be very difficult for them to trust him, he decided to do all in his power to show that he was sincere.

Soon he heard about a conventicle and looked forward to attending. This time, of course, he did not hide behind a wall, but those who knew who he was were very uneasy as they watched him coming among them. Yet one of them, a William Steel from Lesmahagow, who was sitting among the crowd, stood up, took Hepburn by the hand and welcomed him to the assembly of God's people. Steel told him that he hoped that he was still of the same mind as he appeared to be on the night when they crossed the Clyde together. This action encouraged the rest of the people to look favourably on their one-time enemy and to think of him as a converted man. After the services, Steel introduced him to the minister and to some of his friends as a sheep that had wandered away from the fold but had now returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of souls, and as the son of an honoured witness for Christ who was now determined to walk in his father's footsteps.

It was now public knowledge that Hepburn had become a Covenanter. Like everyone else, the curate of Sorn heard about what happened and reacted with anger; he did everything possible to get his hands on his one-time informer. The man from whom Hepburn rented his home felt obliged to send him away; possibly threats had been made against him if he continued to have a Covenanter living in his property. For a time Hepburn went into hiding, and it was said that the sincerity of his profession of conversion was fully tested by the willing manner in which he submitted to the afflictions which the Covenanters suffered.

On the night before he left his home, a troop of soldiers surrounded his house hoping to arrest him. The family were all sound asleep in bed when they were disturbed by the noise of the horses' hooves on the ground and then a loud knocking on the door. Hepburn had for some time been afraid for his safety and was the first to hear the disturbance. He knew what was happening and jumped out of bed, dressed as quickly as possible and went to open the door. It was a dark night and the soldiers probably did not expect the man they

were looking for to open the door to them. They asked him if George Hepburn was inside. Hepburn told them that he was. Then, as they rushed into the house sure of seizing their prey, he made his escape in the confusion.

He now had to wander from place to place, hiding as best he could in mountain caves and among bushes like many of the other Covenanters. For some months he found a safe house in a place called Wellwood. But the curate of Sorn eventually discovered where he was staying and did all in his power to have him arrested. One clear moonlit night, a company of soldiers arrived at Wellwood in search of the fugitive Covenanter. He was in bed, as was everybody in the family he was staying with. They all became afraid for his safety; in the bright moonlight it would have been difficult to get away without being noticed, and soldiers were placed all round the house to prevent his escape. So he crept in among bags of fleeces which were piled up at the end of the house and waited, no doubt praying earnestly to God to watch over him. Meanwhile the soldiers searched every corner of the house and then came back outside. When they came to the pile of wool bags, they thrust in their long swords just in case Hepburn was hiding there. But they missed him and went away; they probably did not really believe that he was hiding among the bags.

Hepburn stayed on in Wellwood for a short time, but each evening he left the house and hid somewhere on the banks of the River Ayr. There he found a cave and slept in it every night for a period, it is said, of six months. At last he became rather weary of this kind of existence and decided to move south to the Galloway area, where he thought he would be safer. On his way there he called at the house of a faithful Covenanter, William Campbell. It turned out that he was away from home; soldiers had been searching for him earlier in the day. Mrs Campbell persuaded Hepburn to spend the night in their house, expecting her husband to come home in the evening. During the night the soldiers returned looking for Campbell; instead they found Hepburn and arrested him. They put him on a horse behind the rider and tied the two men together with a rope made from dry grass. But as they were crossing a deep gorge, the rope gave way and Hepburn slipped down from the horse and landed safely on his feet. It was a dark night and he succeeded in getting away from his captors.

Free again, he continued on his way to Galloway, where he came across one of the best known of Covenanting ministers, James Renwick. As he followed Renwick around the countryside, he had many opportunities of listening to his sermons and gained much blessing for his soul from this young minister's preaching. While they travelled around the countryside together, they often had narrow escapes when groups of soldiers descended

on the houses where they were spending the night. Eventually Renwick was captured and put to death, but Hepburn was still alive when the persecution came to an end in 1688. Indeed it is said that he lived for 40 more years, dying in 1728. The Lord had indeed taken care of him, preserving him from his enemies in various ways.

But, whatever our circumstances, let us remember our need of God’s care – especially so that we would be kept from falling into sin. We ought to pray earnestly for this and, more fundamentally, that He would bring us – as He did George Hepburn – to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

For Younger Readers

“Can That Be True?”

Mr Nott was a missionary. He went far away from his home to one of the islands in the Pacific Ocean to tell them about the Bible. The most important thing he had to tell them was about Jesus, because it is Jesus who saves people from their sins.

He was reading from the Gospel of John one day to some of the people on the island, who were sitting in front of him. Mr Nott came to the verse which says, “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life”.

At least one of the men was listening eagerly. Just after Mr Nott read this verse, the man spoke up.

“What words were those you read?” he asked. “Let me hear those words again.”

So Mr Nott read the verse over again: “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life”.

The man stood up and asked, “Is that true? Can that be true? God love the world when the world not love Him. God so love the world as to give His Son to die, that man might not die! Can that be true?”

Mr Nott read the verse once more. He told the man that it was true, and that this was the message God sent to them. And this was why Mr Nott came to that far-away island – to tell them about God’s love, so that no one who believes in Jesus will perish in hell. They will all be happy in heaven for ever.

The man thought this was all wonderful. But what do you think happened next? He burst into tears. He never heard anything like this before. Then he went away on his own to think about what Mr Nott told him about God's love to sinners.

It was clear afterwards that he really believed in Jesus. This was not just because of what he said – that he loved Jesus and things like that. It was because of how he lived. By keeping God's commands, he made clear that he really loved Jesus and that he believed in Him.

You should learn the verse: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

It really is true because it is in the Bible. God has said it.

For Junior Readers

Peer Pressure

Some of you will be starting secondary school this month. Perhaps you have had to move from a small primary school to a large high school where everything seems new and different. How important it is to stand up for what you believe, and not just to follow the crowd! "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil," the Bible tells us.

It is not easy to be different from everyone else. "Peer pressure" is very strong. There is always pressure to conform to the world and its ways, its dress and its speech. How you need to pray to be kept! But you can use the words of David in Psalm 17:

"Hold up my goings, Lord, me guide
in those Thy paths divine,
So that my footsteps may not slide
out of those ways of Thine".

Although we know it is hard to bear when your friends make unkind comments or when they mock you, yet the Lord can help you to be strong. Think of the three young men in Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Was there not great pressure on them to fall down and worship Nebuchadnezzar's image? Their king had commanded it. Everyone else seemed to be bowing down to worship the idol. And there was a dreadful punishment for disobedience; who would want to be thrown into a burning, fiery furnace?

Yet, God gave strength to these three young men so that they were faithful to Him. Although it seemed as if everyone else in the kingdom was falling down in front of the huge image, they remained standing. They would not bow down to it. You know how the Lord preserved them. Even though they were thrown into the furnace, their lives were saved. Their hair was not even singed. There wasn't even a smell of fire or smoke on them.

How wonderful! Their confidence in God was well placed. "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us", they told the king. And so He did. Truly God is a powerful and merciful God. If you put your trust in Him, He is able to help you just as He delivered Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego long ago.

Some of the early Christians, in the days of the Roman Empire, were once faced with a similar trial. The Emperor, who was a heathen, wanted to know the character of those around him. He called together all the chief men in his court. He then ordered them to offer sacrifices to his gods. If they refused, they would lose their jobs and their high positions in the Empire.

The trial was very severe. Some gave in. They could not face giving up all that was valuable to them. But others were faithful. They would not give away their principles for any price. They refused to offer sacrifices. And what happened? The men who obeyed the Emperor were dismissed. The others, who had so bravely refused, were rewarded. They were placed in the most important positions, close to the Emperor himself. "On these men I can depend," he said, "I prize them more than all my treasures."

Truly you will not be the loser by following God rather than men. Has He not promised, "Them that honour Me I will honour, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed"?

J van Kralingen

The Book of Ruth

80. The Joy of Salvation

Rev Keith M Watkins

Ruth 4:9,10. "And Boaz said unto the elders, and unto all the people, Ye are witnesses this day, that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi. Moreover Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place; ye are witnesses this day."

Boaz made it clear that he was not ashamed to take Ruth to be his wife. Although she was a foreigner from Moab, he wanted the marriage to

be proclaimed throughout Bethlehem. We hear a note of triumphant joy in his announcement. "You are witnesses – witnesses that Ruth is now my wife!" This was no forced marriage. His heart was set on it. He loved Ruth – that is why he married her. He did it because he wanted to, not because he had to. Yes, he had purchased the land, but much more importantly and wonderfully, he had obtained Ruth for his bride.

Of course, it was a great thing for Ruth to get such a husband as Boaz, "a mighty man of wealth". No doubt her heart sang with joy to hear his words: "Moreover Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife". Ruth was a foreigner in a strange land. Naomi her mother-in-law had warned her when they were still in Moab that finding a husband in Israel would be extremely difficult (see 1:11-13). As far as the things of this world were concerned, what could a poor widow like Ruth offer to a husband? Even to be noticed by Boaz had touched her heart so much: "Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?" (2:10). And now to be his wife! It was a wonder of joy to her.

More remarkable is the joy of Boaz. From the world's point of view, he had everything to lose and nothing to gain by marrying Ruth. It involved raising children for Ruth's first husband Mahlon, who had died. It involved buying land from Naomi which would return to the children, who would be counted as Mahlon's. For these reasons, the nearer relative had refused to be the family's redeemer. It would mar his own inheritance (see verse 6). But Boaz could not think of it like that. On the contrary, he considered it great gain to get such a wife as Ruth. He saw Ruth's grace and godliness, and he knew that these were rare qualities indeed. "Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies" (Proverbs 31:10). Boaz the bridegroom rejoiced as much as any over his bride, knowing that "a prudent wife is from the Lord" (Proverbs 19:14). Let unmarried people remember this. It is godliness that makes a husband or wife to be most desired.

The joy of Boaz in getting Ruth for his bride mirrors the Saviour's joy over His bride, the Church. Like Boaz, Christ is not forced to marry. Rather, it is His good pleasure and His heartfelt delight. Not only is He not ashamed to marry them, but He rejoices to do so. His heart has been set on that union from all eternity, for even then His "delights were with the sons of men" (Proverbs 8:31). And when the long-awaited wedding day comes, how He rejoices! "As the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee" (Isaiah 62:5). John the Baptist rejoiced that the heavenly Bridegroom was coming (see John 3:29). How much more the Bridegroom Himself rejoices to take His bride!

It must have multiplied Ruth's joy to see the joy of Boaz. And it ought to double the joy of God's people to consider that, however long they spent in an unconverted state, saddening the heart of the Redeemer, now the same Redeemer delights in them and rejoices in His marriage to them. "Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah: for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married" (Isaiah 62:4). *Hephzibah* means *My delight is in her*. And *Beulah* means *Married*. The Saviour's delight is set on those whom He has married, even though before that union they were forsaken and desolate.

Whether marrying His bride is likened to a good shepherd finding his lost sheep, or to a poor widow finding her lost coin, or to a father finding his lost son, this is the language of the Redeemer's heart: "Rejoice with Me" (see Luke 15). For "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth" (verse 10). Is it the angels who rejoice? Yes, but not only they. Are they joined by "the spirits of just men made perfect"? Surely. But more than that. The exalted Christ Himself rejoices. The day when a sinner repents is the day when the sinner becomes Christ's bride. Jesus calls that "the day of His espousals" – the day when He is joined to the believer in spiritual marriage – and it is "the day of the gladness of His heart" (Song of Solomon 3:11). It is the day He has long been looking for.

The Lord's people love to experience the joy of salvation. If they lose it, they long for its return. That is why David prayed in Psalm 51: "Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation" (verse 12). They will enjoy it without interruption in heaven. But more than that. It is what the Saviour Himself loves to experience. It was "the joy that was set before Him", for which He "endured the cross" (Hebrews 12:2). When the believer can say, "My beloved is Mine, and I am His" (Song of Solomon 2:16), it brings great joy to the soul. But the joy is mutual, because the Saviour's heart overflows when He says to His bride: "I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine" (Isaiah 43:1). In due course they will enter into the king's palace "with gladness great and mirth on every side" (Psalm 45:15, metrical version). Joy on *every* side! Themselves, the angels, and Himself.

"He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with singing" (Zephaniah 3:17). Could it be put any more strongly? So let the spouse of Christ rejoice. Her Bridegroom rejoices in her. You who are still wedded to sin, Satan and the world – will those unfaithful husbands rejoice over you like Christ does over His people? Seek a marriage with Him. Place your delight in Him more than in all else. In doing so you will make His own heart exceedingly glad.

The Last Days of Joash

C H Spurgeon

Another chapter taken from the book *A Good Start* and abridged. It follows on from the article in the June issue with the title: "Joash and His Friend Jehoiada". While Jehoiada his uncle lived, King Joash followed his example remarkably carefully.

All that Joash had done was to give his heart to Jehoiada, not to Jehovah. It is very easy to be outwardly religious by giving your heart to your mother or your father or to some good person who helps you to do what is right. But God says, "My son, give *Me* thine heart". If you take up religion to please any creature, it is not the religion which pleases the Creator. You are to honour Him who sits in the heavens, whose kingdom ruleth over all.

You may yield to godly influences without any personal godliness. You may meet with God's people, and yet not be one of them. You may pay attention to God's servant, and yet not be one yourself. A young man may yield to his mother's advice, yet never really repent on account of sin. He may pay respect to the externals of his father's religion, yet not have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. *You* must repent and believe in Christ; all the rest will not go even a hair's breadth towards your salvation. I wish everyone to examine himself to see whether his is a living religion. I do not enquire now about your mother or father or friends. Have *you* been born again? Are you now condemned under sin, or are you justified by faith in Christ?

If we have been under religious influence from our youth up, it is easy to go on without raising the question whether we are Christians or not, saying to ourselves: Of course it is all right. To be under godly influences year after year, without any great trial or temptation, may leave one's character undeveloped. Some put children under restraint continually – they live only among their own company; there is much prayer and everything that is good – and often, when they go out into the world, those who trained them are altogether disappointed with them; yet they need not wonder. A person on dry land may think he can swim but, when he gets into the sea, it is not certain that he will. We must have some kind of test, or else we cannot be sure of the character; we cannot know whether a child is honest or not if he never has a chance to take what belongs to someone else. That was the condition of Joash. His real character had never come out at all because Jehoiada guided him, but his own disposition only needed an opportunity of developing itself.

I heard of an officer in India who brought up a young leopard. It was as tame as a cat and the officer had no fear of it. He never suspected for a single moment that it would shed blood. But one afternoon, while he was asleep in his chair, the leopard tenderly licked his hand; after a while, it licked too hard,

and a little blood began to flow. It no sooner tasted blood than the old leopard spirit was up, and his master was his master no more. So it happens to many who were subdued but not changed, kept in check but not converted; there comes a time when the taste of blood calls out the old nature, and away they go. It was human nature held in check for a while, not the Spirit of God creating new life and infusing a new character into the soul.

I am speaking to those who have never been renewed in the spirit of their mind. Do not imagine that natural religion is spiritual religion. Do not mistake the lessons learnt at your mother's knee for the teachings of the Holy Ghost, do not confuse *a* change with *the* change. "Ye must be born again", or else, though you started out under the best of influences, you only lack an opportunity, a temptation, and you will go off wherever the old nature carries you. Then you will find out that all your early training issued in nothing because it stopped short of the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Young Joash had been very supple in the hand of Jehoiada, but now Jehoiada was dead. Other counsellors came and flattered him: "Now after the death of Jehoiada came the princes of Judah, and made obeisance to the king". Do you not see them bowing a hundred times? Jehoiada had treated him with due respect as his king, but he had also spoken to him faithfully. Joash had somebody to look up to while Jehoiada lived, and now he found himself a great man with everybody looking up to him. The princes of Judah, who had always preferred the service of Baal, came and bowed to the king.

I think I hear what they said: "Royal sir, now you can think for yourself. It is a fine thing for a young man to be delivered from the power of his old uncle. He was no doubt an excellent person; we were present at his funeral, and we paid him all due respect. Still, he was an old fossil, who never made any progress. He clung to the worship of Jehovah and served the God of his fathers. Now that the good man is asleep, we are sure that you will not let his dead hand rest upon you, but you will keep up with the spirit of the times." Even when a man has reached Joash's age, he is not beyond the power of flattery. So poor Joash, good Joash, Joash who was even more earnest than Jehoiada to repair the temple, was led astray by the soft words of the deceivers. We find him burying his religion in his uncle's grave. And some whom I have known, over whom I have wept, have acted in the same way.

After that, Joash went off to sin. The images he had broken down were set up again; the groves he had cut down were planted again; and he who seemed so zealous a servant of Jehovah now became a worshipper of the accursed Baalim. Joash lacked principle, and I want to warn you all about that. Do not be satisfied with the practice of piety without its principles. It is not enough to have a correct creed; you must have a renewed heart. It is not sufficient

to have a proper form of worship; you must have a holy life, and to be holy you must be renewed by the Holy Spirit. If you are not thus changed, you will yet yield as readily to evil as you now yield to good.

What happened next? Joash refused reproof. God sent prophets to the people, and they warned them against the idolaters: "but they would not give ear". This Joash, who had spent his first six years in the temple, now would not listen to the Lord's prophets. They might speak with all their heart and soul, but he is as the deaf adder that will not hear the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely. Yet he was once your good young man!

I remember many whose story was like this. They always went to the house of God; they were brought up in a house where there was family worship; everybody reckoned them to be Christians. Then they came to London. At first, they went where their father urged them to go, to some humble place where the gospel was preached; but after a time they thought it was not wrong to go on the Sabbath to one of the more showy religious places. Then they went to some showy place that was not religious; they worked so hard all the week that they must go out a little into the fresh air on Sabbath. They found companions who led them, little by little, from the path of integrity and chastity till "the good young man" was as vile as any on the streets of London, and he who seemed to be a saint began to lead others astray.

What did Joash do next? He slew Zechariah, his friend's son, who was at last moved to upbraid the people for turning aside from Jehovah to worship idols. Now the tiger's blood is up! Joash bids them kill him. How dare he testify against his king? I believe that generally the worst persecutors in the world were once tender-hearted. Joash, having no faith in God, robbed the temple, and gave all the gold and treasures to Hazael the Syrian. He became full of disease, and at last his own servants, disgusted with him for his conduct to Jehoiada's son, slew him on his bed. What a death for a young man who was hidden for six years in the house of the Lord!

If I could tell some of you what you will become, you would be so angry with me! If I could prophesy to some good young fellow – outwardly good as Joash was at first, but without a new heart – he would spit in my face. No one is safe from the most abominable sin until they believe in Christ. No one can be sure of escaping the deepest damnation of hell unless they trust in Jesus. Yet God has promised: "The righteous also shall hold on his way; and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger". The Lord will preserve him from evil, for "the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day". I charge you, by the living God, my hopeful young friend, yield yourself to Jesus Christ and seek His guardian care, lest the fair blossom of today should never bring forth fruit.

Looking Around Us

The Bible Tells Us

Early in July, scientists from the United States space agency, Nasa, brought off an amazing feat when they smashed a probe into a comet. Comets have been described as giant “dirty snowballs”, and Comet Tempel 1 is a 14-km-wide mass of ice, dust and rock hurtling through the solar system. The washing-machine-sized probe and the comet closed in on each other at a speed of 37 000 km/h, throwing up a huge plume of icy debris. As it did so, the probe’s mothership, the Deep Impact spacecraft, sent pictures to Earth.

“We hit it just exactly where we wanted to,” said a Nasa mission scientist, obviously delighted at what his team had achieved. Clearly such a mission could not be cheap; and it cost \$333 million. But why spend so much money in this way? Apart from the human thirst for more and more knowledge, the main motive was to find out about the formation of the universe. One report states that comets “are believed to contain materials that have remained largely unchanged since the formation of the solar system 4.6 billion years ago. Scientists hope that by getting ‘under the skin’ of Comet Tempel 1, they can gain new information on the solar system’s original composition and perhaps even about how life emerged in our corner of the universe.”

All this leaves out of account what the Bible tells us. And we can rely on what it says about the formation of the solar system and about how life appeared on earth, because the early chapters of Genesis, like all the rest of the Bible, are a revelation from God. These chapters tell us “that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens” – in other words, the whole universe. And He did this thousands of years ago, rather than billions. The earth is emphasised because this is where God created life – most importantly, mankind – and there is no reason whatever to believe that life exists anywhere else. Although the Bible does not give us detailed scientific information, we can be sure that it tells us all we need to know on creation.

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 art I’ve shown;
About the massy roots I’ll dig,
And if it bear, we’ve gained a 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.

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