

The Young People's Magazine

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Seed on the Wayside

How many sermons will you have heard this year? Confining yourself to Sabbath services, you should in 2006 hear over a hundred sermons – 106 to be exact, if you are always able to be in church.

If you have been listening carefully to these sermons, you should know more about the Bible now that you did a year ago; you should know more about the history and the commandments and the doctrines which God has revealed there. That is important – very important. But that alone should not satisfy you. There is something far more important: you ought to benefit from what you have heard. Remember, you are called to believe on Jesus Christ for salvation.

So have you obeyed the call of the gospel? With all your opportunities of hearing about the Saviour, have you looked to Him? Have you trusted in Him?

One thing is sure. As you listen to the gospel, something is happening – either you believe in Christ or you are rejecting Him. If you are rejecting Him, your heart is becoming harder; it is becoming more resistant to the truths that you are hearing – just like Pharaoh's heart was hardening as he resisted God's command to let Israel leave Egypt.

Do you remember Jesus' parable about the sower? As the sower went out scattering his seed, it fell on four different kinds of ground. Jesus calls the first kind "the wayside" – the path, perhaps at the edge of the field, where the ground had been pressed down hard by the hundreds of feet that had tramped over it. And if you do not believe in Christ, that path is a picture of your heart – becoming harder and harder as the world and the flesh and the devil walk over it again and again.

But what is "the seed"? It is, Jesus tells us, "the word of God" – the Bible. And one highly important way of sowing the seed is to preach. When a minister stands up to preach, he is ready to sow the Word of God. But if your heart is hard, the minister's words are not going to get into it. They will lie on the surface, just like the seeds on the path through the field, where the birds were waiting to swoop down and pick up these seeds – which meant that nothing grew there; the seeds were completely wasted.

And what did Jesus mean by the birds? He was thinking of the devil, when he comes to those who are listening to a sermon. Satan wants to take "away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved" (Luke 8:12). The devil does not want anyone to be saved, he does not want anyone to be rescued from his kingdom and from the awful punishment in hell which must follow a lifetime in that kingdom. He will do all in his power to prevent that happening.

One of his most dangerous activities is to pluck away the truths that come to your ears when God's Word is preached. He helps you to think about other things; he distracts your mind, so that you no longer pay attention to the sermon. Even if you do keep on listening, he helps you to argue with what is being said. Remember what Jesus said about him: "He was a murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44). If you are unconverted, Satan has his heart set on destroying your soul by keeping you on course for a lost eternity. So, however attractive the devil makes his temptations and however interesting he makes his distractions, do not listen to him. Resist him. Concentrate on the message that is coming to you from the Scriptures and ask the Lord Himself to bless you by sending the Holy Spirit to apply that message to your soul.

An old lady regularly went to the church in Plymouth where Robert Hawker was the minister. She was very satisfied with her religion; she thought very well of herself because she read the Bible and went to church, and no doubt she believed she had never done anyone any harm. But her religion had never touched her heart, which was like the wayside in the Saviour's parable; it was very hard after all these years when the world, the flesh and the devil had tramped over it.

One day, when she was not in church, her drunken son went instead. He was able to take in some of what the minister was saying. After the service, he went home and told his mother bluntly: "If what Dr Hawker has asserted is true, and you die as you are, you will go to hell".

She was completely taken aback. She assumed that Hawker had been speaking about her personally. She could not settle until she had sent for him. She asked him what he had been saying about her. He told her, of course, that he had not been speaking about her personally; he had not even been thinking about her. He went on talking with her and discovered that she was quite ignorant of her sinfulness and of the free grace of God in Christ. You can see how busy the devil had been, during every service she had attended, in plucking away the good seed from her heart.

The minister told her that she certainly would go to hell if she died as she was then. His words were described as "a barbed arrow in her conscience".

She began to seek for salvation, not now by her good deeds, but through the free mercy of Jesus Christ, who came into the world to save sinners. Only a few months later, she died “triumphing in redeeming grace”. She was rescued just in time; her hard heart was softened when it was almost too late.

The Holy Spirit can do that. Ask Him to soften your hard heart. Ask Him to do so now, before it is too late. Then, by the time this year has ended, you may be rescued from a lost eternity and from the power of the devil to prevent you profiting from God’s Word. But how sad if these 106 opportunities, and perhaps more, of hearing God’s Word this year are all wasted!

Missionary to India

7. More Converts

Alexander Duff reached Calcutta from Scotland in 1830. He quickly set about establishing a school so that young Indians would come in contact with the Bible. Last month we looked at the conversion of Krishna Mohun Banerjea, one of the first to turn to Christianity under Duff’s influence.

Banerjea was not the very first of Duff’s converts. One day in 1832 a young Indian came to Duff’s door with a note from his brother, Mohesh Chunder Ghose. It began: “If you can make a Christian of him, you will have a valuable one; and you may rest assured that you have my hearty consent to it. Convince him and make him a Christian, and I will give no secret opposition.” Certainly, it was beyond Duff’s power to make anyone a true Christian, but the Lord is able to use men like Duff as instruments in turning sinners to Himself – and He did.

But it was Mohesh himself who was the first to be savingly changed. He was a student at the Government’s Hindu College. At that time he doubted everything in religion, and his doubting made him thoroughly miserable; he did not want his brother to have to endure such misery. Mohesh doubted the existence of the eternal world and he doubted that God is good. All this, he confessed, “made me too unhappy and spread a gloom all over my mind”. Yet he imagined that he would eventually come to believe the doctrines of Christianity. Every time he thought of it, he admitted: “its evidence becomes too overpowering”. He had attended some of Duff’s lectures and these were obviously having a great effect on his mind.

But, several months later, Banerjea’s newspaper announced that Mohesh had been baptised. The editor commented that Duff had reason to rejoice “that his labours have, through the grace of the Almighty, been instrumental in convincing some of the truth of Christianity”. Later, in Duff’s house,

Mohesh exclaimed in amazement at the thought that he was now “a baptised Christian”, while just 12 months before, he had been an atheist. Then, he recalled, “I was the most miserable of the miserable; and what am I now? In my own mind, the happiest of the happy. What a change!”

When he first attended Duff's lectures, Mohesh admitted, he did not come to be instructed. That was just an excuse; he really wanted to expose what he took to be the superstitious folly of Duff's ideas. Yet at last he had to accept that Christianity was true: “Its evidence was so strong that I could not resist it. But I still *felt* contrary to what I *thought*.” Such is the power of the natural mind to resist God's truth.

The truths of Christianity not only affected his mind but also his heart; he not only accepted that they were true but his soul was savingly changed. “On hearing your account of the nature of sin, and especially sins of the heart,” Mohesh told Duff, “my conscience burst upon me like a volcano. My soul was pierced through with horrible reflections and terrible alarms.” Mohesh described further how, as he absorbed more of Duff's teaching and thought more about it, “I began, I know not how or why, to find relief from the words of the Bible”. God Himself was clearly now instructing him and he was finding the teaching of Scripture to be the complete opposite of foolishness; he could see that it was the height of wisdom. His whole heart was changed; he had new attitudes. “What I once hated most,” he could now say, “I soon began to love most, and now I love it altogether”. No wonder he exclaimed: “What a change!”

He could see clearly that he had not earned salvation. Far from it. “My progress”, he emphasised, “was not that of earnest inquiry, but of earnest opposition. And to the last, my heart was opposed. *In spite of myself* I became a Christian. Surely some unseen power must have been guiding me. Surely this must have been what the Bible calls *grace*, free grace, sovereign grace. And if ever there was an election of grace surely I am one.”

Two months later, Banerjea's baptism took place and, after a further two months, Gopeenath Nundi was baptised. The last of Duff's lectures had made him go to Banerjea for advice. Banerjea prayed with him and told him that he should go to speak to Duff. The next morning he did so, and in Duff's study he burst into tears and asked, “Can I be saved?”

At first his family imprisoned him, no doubt in their own house, and then they put an advertisement in a newspaper stating that they were casting their son off for ever. His brothers had pleaded with him to give up his new religion; then they turned on him and treated him badly; but Gopeenath remained unmoved. Then there was another change of tactics; they offered him all the wealth and pleasure he could possibly have; they even suggested

that he could keep on believing in Christianity provided he did not profess it publicly. His mother's shrieks moved him to tears, but all he said, as he threw up his hands, was: "No, I cannot stay".

Anundo Chund Mozoomdar was the lad who had expressed amazement at the divine power of the Sermon on the Mount. He had been the first to go to Duff's home for further instruction. After Anundo gave up worshipping idols, his uncle complained to Duff that the lad was now an atheist and complained that he had blasphemed the Hindu gods – though the missionary would have seen the matter in a very different light. Yet Anundo's father wrote to Duff giving him permission to take Anundo as his son. "Convert him in your own way," he told Duff, "and make him your follower." Anundo was baptized in April 1833; he was professing, not so much to be a follower of Duff, but a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ – one who was now seeking to learn from the great Teacher who came from heaven to save a sinful world.

The Danger of Thoughtlessness

J C Ryle

Another piece, slightly edited, from this noted nineteenth-century English minister. The third in a series on dangers to young people, it follows the article in June.

Lack of thought is one simple reason why thousands of souls are cast away for ever. People will not consider, will not look forward, will not look around them, will not reflect on the end of their present course and the sure consequences of their present ways. And they will awake at last to find they are damned for lack of thinking.

Young people, no one is in more danger of this than yourselves. You know little of the perils around you, and so you do not pay attention how you walk. You hate the trouble of sober, quiet thinking, and so you form wrong decisions and run your heads into sorrow. Young Esau must have his brother's pottage and sell his birthright; he never *thought* how much he should one day want it. Young Simeon and Levi must needs avenge their sister Dinah and slay the Shechemites; they never *considered* how much trouble and anxiety they might bring on their father Jacob and his household. Job seems to have been specially afraid of this thoughtlessness among his children; it is written that when they had a feast, and "the days of their feasting were gone about, Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning and offered burnt-offerings, according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually" (Job 1:5).

Believe me, this world is not a world in which we can do well without thinking, and least of all do well in the matter of our souls. "Don't think", whispers Satan; he knows that an unconverted heart is like a dishonest tradesman's books; it will not bear close inspection. "Consider your ways," says the Word of God – stop and think; consider and be wise. Well says the Spanish proverb: "Hurry comes from the devil". Just as people marry in haste and then repent at leisure, so they make mistakes about their souls in a minute and then suffer for it for years. Just as a bad servant does wrong and then says, "I never gave it a thought", so young people run into sin and then say, "I did not think about it; it did not look like sin".

Not look like sin! What would you have? Sin will not come to you, saying, "I am sin"; it would do little harm if it did. Sin always seems good and pleasant and desirable, at the time of commission. O get wisdom, get discretion! Remember the words of Solomon: "Ponder the paths of thy feet, and let thy ways be established" (Proverbs 4:26). It is a wise saying of Lord Bacon, "Do nothing rashly. Stay a little, that you make an end the sooner".

Some, I dare say, will object that I am asking what is unreasonable, that youth is not the time of life when people ought to be serious and thoughtful. I answer, there is little danger of their being too much so in the present day. Foolish talking and jesting and joking and excessive merriment are only too common. Doubtless there is a time for all things, but to be always light and trifling is anything but wise. What says the wisest of men? "It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth" (Ecclesiastes 7:2-4).

Matthew Henry tells a story of a great statesman in Queen Elizabeth I's time who retired from public life in his latter days and gave himself up to serious thought. His former light-hearted companions came to visit him and told him he was becoming dull. "No," he replied, "I am *serious*; for all are serious round about me. God is serious in observing us; Christ is serious in interceding for us; the Spirit is serious in striving with us; the truths of God are serious; our spiritual enemies are serious in their attempts to ruin us; poor lost sinners are serious in hell; and why then should not you and I be serious too?"

O, young people, learn to be thoughtful! Learn to consider what you are doing, and where you are going. Make time for calm reflection. Commune with your own heart, and be still. Remember my caution: Do not be lost merely for the lack of thought.

Running the Race

4. Continuing in the Christian Race (2)

Rev Neil M Ross

This is the fourth part of a Youth Conference talk, sub-titled, "some Bible teaching about the Christian life". Last month we began the longest section, "Continuing in the Christian Race", and focused on the duty to "lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us". We now look at some other sins which Satan tempts young Christians especially to commit.

Satan also works with much success through strong drink. Many verses in Scripture warn about the fearful results of drunkenness. The Apostle Paul advised Timothy that the amount of wine he was to take for his health was just "a little" (1 Timothy 5:23). When listing sins in his letter to the Galatian church, Paul ends with these solemn words: "Drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God". Some young people have yielded to the pressure of companions to go with them and have found to their cost that one step led to another in a downward direction. They went, for example, to a bar for "just one drink", or to a friend's house or some other place of meeting to which strong drink was taken for the occasion – but they did not stop after one drink.

Recently I read an instructive anecdote in the life of the famous minister, Thomas Hogg. When he was a student in Aberdeen, still unconverted, he and a companion were one evening urged by two other men to enter an inn for a drink. They yielded and had a drink; then Hogg got up to leave. The three others not only refused to go with him but tried to restrain him physically from going. He twisted himself out of their grip and went back to his room. He felt strangely uneasy and could not sleep till after the clock struck one. Next day, on his way to classes, he met his companion of the night before. To his horror, he was told that, some time after he left the inn, the two other men, now under the influence of drink, began to quarrel and fight. Then one of them struck the other a fatal blow – at one o'clock in the morning. Ever afterwards, Hogg had a very strong aversion to drunkenness.

In thinking of youthful lusts and the sins which easily beset us, we should think also about the Christian's outward appearance. It is true that God looks on the heart, while man looks upon the outward appearance. But the outward appearance does matter; it is part of a Christian lifestyle. Take clothing, for example: certain ways of dressing can lead to sin, and so we should remember some Scripture principles.

First, Deuteronomy 22:5 teaches us that there ought to be a distinction

between male and female in their clothing: "The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the Lord thy God". Changes in fashion do not cancel out this principle. It was in the 1960s, says a writer on the history of fashion, "that the distinctions between clothing made for men and that made for women became less and less obvious". The principle remains however: God has ordained that there be a clear distinction between the sexes. In our culture, the dress or skirt is still viewed as the distinctly female garment.

Second, clothing should be modest. In 1 Timothy 2:9 Paul instructed Timothy to teach "that women adorn themselves in modest apparel" – that is, as Matthew Poole comments, they are to "observe a decency with respect to the modesty of their sex [and] the purity of religion". Paul went on to add in the same verse, "with shamefacedness and sobriety", which might be paraphrased as, "with a feeling of respect for others, and self-restraint". This is why it is wrong to wear revealing clothing, whether too low at the neck, or too short or too tight. We are aware that this is a controversial issue among some professing Christians, and that extreme views are held by some. One pastor said, in addressing the issue, "No doubt when we reach the end of this article, I will appear a spineless liberal to some; and to others I will be just another wave of legalism lapping upon the shores of Christian liberty" (*Christian Modesty* by Jeff Pollard). However, there is no disputing the fact that the fashion industry takes a decidedly-immodest approach to the design of much women's clothing. Take, for example, the mini-skirt popularised by fashion designer Mary Quant in 1962. She made clear that her objective was to make the wearer enticing to the opposite sex.

At this point I wish to mention that Scripture requires a covering to be on a woman's head (but not on a man's) in the public worship of God: "Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered?" (1 Corinthians 11:13). This does not refer to the woman's hair, which is indeed given her for a covering, as verses 14 and 15 show: "Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering." An examination of the whole passage shows that the woman is, in public worship, to have a covering upon the natural covering of her hair.

Some people say, when we mention these biblical requirements, that we are being legalistic. This is not true. To be legalistic is really to depend on our own keeping of the law so that we will merit salvation from God and He will accept us as righteous. This is the very opposite of what we believe and

of what is preached among us. This charge of being legalistic is usually levelled by those who, as the self-appointed champions of Christian liberty, really want more freedom to engage in worldly activities – those who shudder at, and shrink from, the idea of being distinctly separate from the world.

Because we warn against various sinful recreations and pleasures, we are said to be against recreation; but this too is not correct. The Bible teaches us that God has given us all things richly to enjoy, and this includes recreation. George Swinnock, a Puritan minister, said, “The merciful God is pleased out of His bounty, not only to allow His creatures what is for necessity, but also what is for delight”. He adds, “As for vain and sinful recreations, I must, in the name of God, forbid them. I am not about to teach thee how to honour God by doing Satan’s work. Be sure that thy recreation be innocent – neither dishonourable to God, nor disadvantageous to thy neighbour.”

Swinnock also gives some guidelines for the Christian use of recreation and pleasure. (1) We must be moderate in them. “Remember,” he says, “that thy recreation is not to be thy occupation. When our lives are nothing else but a diversion from one pleasure to another, we may fear our deaths will be the beginning of our pains.” (2) We must have right reasons for pursuing them – certainly the glory of God, but also relaxation and refreshing of body and mind. “Oil the wheels,” says Swinnock, “that thou mayest move the more cheerfully, and run the more swiftly in the way of God’s commandments.” (3) We must engage in them at appropriate times. “Recreations,” he says, “are like some fruits, not always in season.” Our recreations are unseasonable, for example, if they are on the Lord’s day, which is the day for spiritual pleasure, not secular pleasure.

For Junior Readers – Lessons from the Life of John G Paton

Difficult Decisions

John G Paton had left school and was working with his Dad, but he wanted to get a better education. He wanted to learn more because he wanted to train to be a missionary preacher. It was probably the Holy Spirit working in his heart as he listened to his Dad’s prayers which made him want to be a missionary.

John wrote about his Dad: “When on his knees, and all of us kneeling around him in family worship, he poured out his whole soul with tears for the conversion of the heathen world to the service of Jesus”. He also prayed about the needs of all the family.

John went on to say: “As we rose from our knees, I used to look at the

light on my father's face, and wish I were like him in spirit". John hoped that, "in answer to his prayers", he might be "prepared to carry the blessed gospel to some portion of the heathen world."

So John started to prepare himself by taking a job for the Ordnance Survey of Scotland; they were making maps of every part of the country. He did not have to work such long hours in this job – only 9 am to 4 pm. So, once he had walked the four miles home, he had time to study in the evenings. He also used to study at lunchtime, instead of playing football with the other young men.

His manager had noticed John going to study his books at lunchtime. He called John to come and see him, and asked him what he was doing and why. John told him what he would like to do with his life. Some time later the manager asked to see John again.

The manager must have liked John's serious nature and probably knew he was a hard worker and could be trusted. He offered John a much better job in the company and also the opportunity of special training, with all expenses paid. All John needed to do was sign up to work for Ordnance Survey for seven years. It was a good offer but John did not want to tie himself down to this work for seven years. He was only prepared to do it for three or four years.

His manager got annoyed with him for refusing such a wonderful opportunity. "Why?" he asked John, "Will you refuse an offer that many gentlemen's sons would be proud of?"

"My life is given to another Master," said John, "so I cannot engage for seven years.

"To whom?" asked the manager, sounding annoyed.

"To the Lord Jesus, and I want to prepare as soon as possible for His service in the proclaiming of the gospel." Do you think the manager was impressed with John's dedication? Indeed he was not. "Accept my offer," he told John, "or you are dismissed on the spot!"

What was John to do? He needed money and time so that he could study. This job, with the extra training, all paid for him, would have been ideal. But he could not do it for seven years. That was too long a time to stay away from the work of preaching to the heathen. But if he did not accept the offer, he would have no job and no money. How then could he prepare himself for God's work?

But John was sure in his own mind what the Lord wanted him to do. A short time later, he found himself walking home with his last pay-packet from Ordnance Survey in his hand. No job to go to and very little money to live on. Although he was sad about losing his job, John was glad about one

thing: he would not need to listen any more to the men he worked with; they were always swearing.

If you had been in a situation like John's, I wonder whether you would have been tempted with the promotion and the offer of more money? Would you have agreed to commit yourself to something that you knew was not really the best thing to do?

Even from a young age, you may have to make difficult decisions and choices in life. For instance, who are your friends? Do they swear, or do they make rude jokes, or are they cheeky to adults? If they are, then maybe you should look for some other friends. They might not be so popular or so funny, but they will probably be nicer and make better friends in the long run.

And what do you do with your friends when you are playing? And how do you spend your free time when you are by yourself? Are you playing games and doing things you know your dad and mum would be happy with? Or are you doing what you would keep away from, if your parents were watching you? Remember, even although your parents cannot see what you are doing, God can.

So, when you are tempted to do something you know is wrong and you think you will not get caught, remind yourself, "Thou God seest me". And ask Him to give you the strength to say, "No!" Ask God to help you make the right decisions and choices. No matter how small you think the matter is, God is willing to help you make the right choice. "What man is he that feareth the Lord? Him shall He teach in the way that He shall choose" (Psalm 25:12).

S M Campbell

The Book of Ruth

94. David's Grandfather

Rev K M Watkins

Ruth 4:17b. "They called his name Obed: he is the father of Jesse, the father of David."

The son of Boaz and Ruth was called Obed, meaning *servant*. Like many other boys, he served his parents and family. No doubt he served his generation in Bethlehem. But in what special way did Obed serve? The text tells us: "He is the father of Jesse, the father of David". Obed had a son called Jesse, who in turn had eight sons, the youngest being David. Obed's great importance was to have David for his grandson, for David became the great king of Israel. To be David's grandfather was no small matter, for David's influence for good cannot be overstated.

The Book of Ruth began with the time of the judges, when every man did what was right in his own eyes. Forgetting God and casting away His commands, the people pleased themselves with sin. By ending with David, the Book takes us to a very different time, a time when God's appointed king ruled the land in accordance with God's will, and when many people followed the ways of the Lord. With David as king, many did not even want to follow the ways of sin any more. They preferred to follow the king who followed the Lord. God used Obed to bring about this great change, for no doubt he played his own part in shaping young David's character and directing him in the right way; this was his great service.

Here is a way for us to serve a useful purpose in the world. Let us be ready for God to use us, even in a small way, to influence people in a better direction. We live in days when most people forget God and do what pleases themselves, not what pleases God. What a change is needed! As the Lord helps us, let us pray for that change and do what we can to move things in the right direction.

Obed lived in a "day of small things" (Zechariah 4:10), when the true religion was at a low ebb, and few of God's wonderful works were seen. It would not be until his grandson's days that the Lord would once again restore His people and do great and mighty things to make them glad. Obed's duty was to hold on to the truth and pass it on to coming generations. When David arose, it was that same truth which was blessed.

If we have any understanding of the times, we live in a day of small things. Great revivals and awakenings seem to be things of the past, and we can only say: "We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what work Thou didst in their days, in the times of old" (Psalm 44:1). But our duty is the same as Obed's. We must keep what we have and pass it on to coming generations, when God will send His blessing once again. The Saviour Himself explains our way of serving: "That which ye have already hold fast till I come" (Revelation 2:25). Better days are coming, when Jesus will bless His Word and ordinances abundantly again. Meanwhile, let us be found faithful.

David delivered the Israelites from their enemies. God's people were in deep trouble when all Israel trembled before the giant Goliath of the Philistines. But David went forth to slay him with a stone from a sling. It was only the beginning of many victories that the Lord worked through David. It was not Obed himself who led Israel to victory and conquered these enemies. However, Obed was David's honourable grandfather, and helped to make David what he was.

You yourself might not seem to do mighty things for the cause of Christ.

Perhaps you will never see the Lord's enemies being conquered by your personal service. But if you can be the means of encouraging others to go forth and fight the world, the flesh and the devil, how useful you will be! If others are used by the Saviour to weaken Satan's kingdom and advance the kingdom of God, and you pray for them, how useful you will be!

By leading to David, Obed led people to the Word of God, for David became "the sweet psalmist of Israel" (2 Samuel 23:1). He was the one who penned so many sacred psalms, to be used ever since as the hymns of God's people – and will be to the end of the world. David wrote by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, so that the result was God's pure word, but David wrote as only David would write. David's character is there, David's feelings and experiences are there, along with David's griefs and joys. Obed was part of what made David to be the David who would write the psalms just as they are written. What a contribution that was!

Here is an encouragement to us to serve by leading people back to God's Word. It would be no small thing today if people would just take hold of their Bible again and turn its pages and ponder its teachings prayerfully. Let us tell people: "To the law and to the testimony" (Isaiah 8:20). And let us do what we can to turn the professing Christians and churches back to David's book, the Book of Psalms, to be their manual of praise and the only hymn-book authorised by God Himself.

Scripture not only records David's own inspired writings. It also contains a detailed record of David's life. And what a life! This grandson of Obed was good, but not perfect. His was an example, not of perfection, but of sincere godliness. Like Peter in the New Testament, David had his faults. David shows us the life of grace in a true child of God, with all its ups and downs. He shows us that sin remains in the best of believers, but it no longer reigns. In David we see how "the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other" (Galatians 5:17). David's sins are recorded, but so are his bitter tears of repentance. His faults are not hidden, but neither is his faith in the Lord.

We know very little of Obed. But of his grandson David we know a great deal. David's life is recorded in Scripture to teach us, to warn us and to encourage us. How many have been helped by David! Let them remember whose grandson he was. Perhaps David himself had seen real godliness in his grandfather before he felt it in his own soul. In any case, Obed led to David, who has helped so many in their spiritual journey. In our days, when there is so much confusion over the basic question of what a real Christian is, let us also lead people to the examples of true religion recorded in Scripture.

For Younger Readers

“Do You Know Anything?”

It was a long, long time ago. There were no planes; there were no cars or buses. Probably there were no trains either. It was not easy to get from one place to another.

You could perhaps catch a mail-coach. But it would take a very long time to get where you wanted to go; the mail-coach was drawn by a team of four horses.

One day a man was sitting on the top of a coach right behind the driver. The driver held the reins of the horses and controlled them, making them go faster or slowing them down.

The man was asking the driver lots of questions about the places on the road. He might have asked about the name of this village or that farm. He might have asked about the names of the people who lived there. He might have asked when some houses and churches were built.

Anyway, he asked question after question after question. And he always got the same answer. It was: “I don’t know”.

At last the man got tired of this answer. So he asked, “Do you know anything?”

“Yes,” was the answer, “I know how to drive the coach.”

Although there were so many things he did not know, he knew what really mattered. He was not on the coach to answer questions; he was there to drive the horses so that the coach would reach the right place at the end of the journey.

People may ask you lots of questions. Perhaps you too will often have to answer: “I don’t know”.

But one question is more important than any other. It is this: How do you get to heaven?

If you cannot answer that question, it does not matter how many other questions you can answer. You will never get to heaven.

But what is the answer? It is to trust in Jesus Christ, who died instead of sinners.

If you do trust in Christ, all will be well with you. Many other things are important, but this is far more important than anything else. It is the only thing that really matters.

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*Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil
days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no
pleasure in them (Ecclesiastes 12:1)*

Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland

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Looking Around Us

Christ and Christmas

Christmas is almost here, but nowadays it takes a long time coming. Even in early November, Christmas trees are beginning to appear in public places. As year follows year, this festival becomes less and less religious – in other words, more and more secular. So lots of people think that its origin has been forgotten. And so we hear the cry from many quarters: “Put Christ back into Christmas”.

A proper response to that cry is to ask: Ought the name of Christ ever to have been associated with what is, in fact, a heathen festival? Of course not.

So what is the true origin of Christmas? One writer in America speaks of Christians who wish to “put Christ back into Christmas”. He asks: “Why are so many aspects of the season pre-Christian and pagan? Christians took over the December 25 Roman . . . festival of the birth of the invincible sun Christians took over German mid-winter festival celebrations which used evergreen trees and holly as symbols of eternal life. Where is Christ in all of this?” The Christmas tree, he emphasises, is “a purely pagan symbol taken from these ancient German mid-winter festivals”. So in a time when “Christmas is more a commercial enterprise than a religious observance . . . it’s possible to go through the whole Christmas season while encountering few, if any, significantly-Christian elements”.

This man was claiming to provide a guide to atheism and agnosticism (the idea that no one can tell if God exists). Of course, he had his own unbelieving reasons for writing as he did; he was trying to oppose all Christian influence in society. Yet he is right in what he says about Christmas. But what we need is a Christianity founded clearly on the Bible, a Christianity which is free from all elements of paganism. This writer himself needs to listen to the teachings of Christianity, as declared in the Bible.

The central truth of true Christianity is: “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). So eternal life has nothing to do with heathen symbols; it has everything to do with Christ coming into the world. But let us remember what is so often overlooked when people emphasise His birth: that He came to die as the sin-bearer. He died instead of sinners; He took their punishment so that they would not have to suffer in hell. So everyone who believes in Jesus will have eternal life; they will be in heaven for ever. It is impossible for any of them to perish – to endure the punishment of their sins in hell – for Christ died instead of them.

“As in Months Past”

Based on the words of Job 39:2: “Oh that I were as in months past!” these verses show the ups and downs of the Christian life. Yet Newton did not always feel as desolate as when he wrote like this; the promise holds sure: “My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19).

Sweet was the time when first I felt
The Saviour’s pardoning blood
Applied, to cleanse my soul from guilt,
And bring me home to God.

Soon as the morn the light revealed,
His praises tuned my tongue;
And when the evening shades prevailed,
His love was all my song.

In vain the tempter spread his wiles,
The world no more could charm;
I lived upon my Saviour’s smiles,
And leaned upon His arm.

In prayer my soul drew near the Lord,
And saw His glory shine;
And when I read His holy word,
I called each promise mine.

Then to His saints I often spoke,
Of what His love had done;
But now my heart is almost broke,
For all my joys are gone.

Now when the evening shade prevails,
My soul in darkness mourns;
And when the morn the light reveals,
No light to me returns.

My prayers are now a chattering noise,
For Jesus hides His face;
I read, the promise meets my eyes,
But will not reach my case.

John Newton