

The Young People's Magazine

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“I May as Well Go in for Once”

In the north of England there lived a poor woman who used to go regularly to a little church. But, till the day she died, her husband never went to any church. He was an ungodly man who drank too much and swore. But his wife kept on praying for him though she never saw any sign that God had heard her prayers. Week by week she went to church and always her dog followed her. During the service the dog curled up under her seat and then, when everything was over, it followed her home.

At last the woman died. Her seat in the little church was now empty. But strangely her dog kept on going to church. Perhaps it followed someone else instead of its mistress to the place of worship. Eventually the husband decided to follow the dog, to find out where it was going. He was very surprised to see it make for the church and then go inside. And he said to himself: “I may as well go in for once”. He did so, and the Lord graciously applied His Word with power to the man's soul. How remarkable!

God sometimes works in very surprising ways to bring sinners to hear His Word. Yet some people refuse to think seriously about their need of salvation until something remarkable happens in their lives; they will not seek God otherwise. Yes, God *may* work in a surprising way when He is going to convert somebody, but we must not demand that He does so. He tells us: “Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord”. The matter is urgent. If we delay, for whatever reason, we may be too late; God cannot be found on the other side of death. What is more, when sinners harden their hearts and refuse to seek salvation, God may leave them to themselves. Then He will no longer be near to them. The time to seek God is *now*.

The man whose wife had died ought always to have gone to church. He had no right to stay away; nor had he any right to ignore his Bible or refuse to pray. Everyone else is in the same position before God. No one has any right to expect something out of the ordinary to happen to attract him to go to church and to make him seek salvation. God, in His kindness, did some-

thing extraordinary for this man, but he had no right to *expect* it. We are to seek God in the ordinary ways He has appointed in which sinners may find salvation; we are to read our Bible, pray, go to church and think about God's Word. And we are to do so earnestly and without delay.

Yet the most ordinary conversion is a wonderful thing. Every conversion is a miracle. It cannot happen apart from God's power. No one can change themselves; it must be the work of the Holy Spirit. How necessary then to be totally dependent on God for this great change and not to trust in ourselves! Yet it is our duty to be as earnest in making use of all the means of salvation – such as Bible-reading and prayer – as if salvation itself was something within our own power.

When God's Word began to impress the man's mind, perhaps no one could see that anything was happening. Probably that was true of Lydia when she listened to Paul preaching. Probably no one noticed when God opened her heart so that "she attended unto the things" which Paul was saying. But a wonderful work was taking place. She began to believe the Word of God. If she had been left to the workings of her own mind, she would never have believed; she would have resisted the truths that Paul was setting before her and the other women who had gathered at the riverside. But the Holy Spirit came to work in her heart; that was why she was able to believe in Christ. And, though no one saw Him there, we can be quite sure that Jesus Himself was present. He was Lydia's Saviour, and that day He did a wonderful work in her heart by the Holy Spirit.

Through the Word of God, the man began to see that he was a sinner. Up till then he was blind to that solemn fact. He did not consider that a holy God had created him, that he was responsible to this holy God for how he lived in this world, and that he must at last appear before the judgement seat to give in his account to Him for all that he had done – whether good or bad. The man did not take it to heart that he was obliged to obey all the commandments of this holy God. He was not conscious that he had a sinful nature, which was offensive to God. He was blind to the danger of being sent away for ever to a lost eternity because of his sins.

He was also blind to the possibility of salvation. One assumes that he never thought about Jesus Christ as the One whom God had sent to die for sinners. He ignored his duty to believe in this Saviour and to follow Him. He refused to heed his duty to worship God, although he had the example of his wife, who went to church regularly week by week. And he was blind to the power of the Holy Spirit, although it was by the Spirit's power that his wife's nature had been changed. (One assumes, from the little that is said about her, that she was indeed a converted woman.) The man may have loved her, but

he no doubt hated her godliness. He was blind to his great privilege in having one of God’s children living with him, showing him a godly example and praying for him.

What a remarkable change took place when this man began to see that he was a sinner! But what was the cause of this change? The Lord Jesus, working by the Holy Spirit, had begun to open his eyes. It was like what happened when Jesus met Bartimaeus at Jericho and opened his eyes. Perhaps no one could see anything happening to Bartimaeus. But they soon saw him following Jesus, and they knew that something very significant had happened. Now he was different; everyone could see that.

And perhaps, as the man sat in a seat in the little English church, nobody was aware that anything was happening in his heart. But God knew; He had opened the eyes of this man’s soul. Now the man could see what he had never seen before. He now knew that he was a sinner and that he needed Jesus Christ to be his Saviour. He could also see that Jesus Christ is indeed a suitable Saviour for sinners like him. So he began to cry to the Lord Jesus for mercy – as Bartimaeus had done long before then. And he was heard, just as Bartimaeus was heard. His sins were forgiven. What is more, he began to follow Christ, and that included – among many other things – giving up his drinking and swearing. Although nobody might have seen any outward effects of the Word of God as he sat in the church, everybody would eventually have seen the changes in his life as he went regularly to public worship and tried to live a godly life.

No doubt the man saw more and more of the wonders of salvation as the weeks and years went by. The eyes of his soul had been opened. He now knew that the Word of God is precious because it reveals the way of salvation through Jesus Christ. He knew too that, in the Bible, he had a guidebook that showed him how to proceed on the way to heaven. And no doubt he made good use of it till the day that he followed his wife to glory.

Perhaps his wife was often tempted to give up praying for him. But she did not give up – although it was not till after her death that her prayers were answered. It was indeed a wonderful blessing that her husband had someone godly to pray for him. If someone is praying for you, you too have a great privilege; you should be very thankful. But do not rely on someone else’s prayers; you must pray for yourself. And you should pray earnestly. Ask God to take away the blindness of your heart. Ask Him: “Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law”. And ask Him to make you able, by faith, to see Jesus as the Saviour whom God has appointed for sinners like you. Christ calls you: “Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else”.

The Angel of the Covenant

5. Appearances to Joshua and Afterwards

Rev Angus Smith

A theophany is an appearance of God in human nature – in Old Testament times. Last month we looked at the various appearances of the Son of God, as the Angel of the Lord, to Israel in the wilderness. This article completes the series.

We now come back to the land of Emmanuel, or Canaan, around which all covenant activity seemed to revolve in those days. God, their Angel, was to plant His Church there, and it would inherit the covenant promises to Abraham. The Angel would come into the world as a true man in due time through the tribe of Judah. The Lord was to enter into a covenant with David that Christ should come through his family, but that was only an extra point added to the covenant already made with Abraham. God's children would realise that the earthly Canaan was only a picture of heaven. All the nations of the world would be blessed with the gospel, and the spiritual children of Abraham would be found throughout the world.

After the death of Moses, Joshua crossed Jordan and circumcised all the males, for circumcision was a seal of the covenant which God had made with the people. As Joshua stood by Jericho – no doubt examining it in view of the attack that was to follow – he saw a man with a drawn sword. He approached the man to ask, "Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?" The man answered, "Nay, but as Captain of the Lord's host am I now come".

Joshua recognised that this was the Lord and fell on his face in worship; he asked the Lord what He wanted him to do. Joshua was told to take off his shoes, because the place of the Lord's presence was holy. The Lord promised to give Jericho into Joshua's hand. The conquest of most of the land followed. The Angel, not Joshua, was the real leader of God's people, to direct and help them, and He still is. It was He who brought down the walls of Jericho, giving them faith that this would happen. On the other hand, He gave faith to Rahab, and her house on the top of the wall did not fall down.

In the Book of Judges, we see the people slack in completing the conquest after Joshua's death. So the Angel of the Lord revealed Himself once more, coming up from Gilgal – where Joshua had renewed covenant circumcision – to Bochim. There He reproached the people for their faithlessness, and the people wept – which was why they called the place Bochim (weepers).

From then on, the history of Israel is full of times of declension, and times of partial restoration through judges raised up by the Lord. On one such occasion, the Angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon to make him Israel's champion against the Midianites and the Amalekites. The Angel departed to

heaven in the fire of a burnt offering, which itself must have significance for the Person and future work of the Angel. Later the Angel of the Lord appeared to Samson's mother when she was barren, and told her she would yet have a son. This son, the Angel told her, would be a Nazarite from the womb, and would begin to deliver Israel from their enemies. Again when Manoah, her husband, offered a burnt offering to the Lord, the Angel went up in the flame to heaven. These things point forward to the finished work of the Angel in New Testament days, when He would be the Son of Man, and would ascend to heaven through the worthiness of His own sacrifice.

However, in the days of Samuel, the last of the judges, "the word of the Lord was precious . . . there was no open vision". But the Angel appeared again when Solomon was king. He asked wisdom from the Angel of the Lord – although he already had wisdom – so that he could rule over the kingdom where the people of the Lord were. Solomon was only the representative of the Angel King, who was the real ruler of Israel. It was a dream that Solomon saw, but in it the actual Lord appeared. When the temple was completed, Scripture says that the Lord appeared unto him the second time, establishing the promises already given to Solomon, David and Abraham.

Shortly after Solomon's death the ten tribes rebelled. They turned completely from the Lord; so future blessings were mainly through the tribe of Judah. Although Judah itself was at last carried into captivity because of their sins, they did not completely depart from the Lord. Remember that when the Angel of Jehovah would one day enter the world with a true human nature, He would do so in the tribe of Judah.

After the death of Uzziah king of Judah, Isaiah had a theophany in which he saw the Lord sitting on a throne which was high and exalted. It was as if He was assuring His people that He was their glorious, living King in contrast to a dead Uzziah – and that, as their King, He was caring for them.

Ezekiel also saw the Lord as a King, during the captivity in Babylon. He described what he saw: "Upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man". The man also resembled fire, so we are reminded of the appearance of the Angel of the Lord in human form from the time of Abraham onwards, and also of the Shekinah appearance. Ezekiel saw this theophany a number of times, for God was protecting His own covenant people and threatening their enemies, stating, "Nevertheless I will remember My covenant with thee in the days of thy youth" (Ezekiel 16:60). The nations round about the promised land would be punished, as would evil people in Israel, but Canaan would be restored to the captives: "They shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob My servant" (Ezekiel 28:25).

In Daniel's time, Nebuchadnezzar, the heathen emperor of Babylon, saw

the Son of God as in human form, with the three wrongly-condemned Jews in the furnace. All were unharmed; the covenant Angel was demonstrating there His infallible keeping of His own people. Daniel himself saw the Angel in human form during a night vision (Daniel 7). The Angel was brought near the throne of God and an everlasting kingdom was given to Him.

Again, the Angel appeared to Daniel during a fast. He saw the Angel as a man clothed in fine linen, who had his loins girded with fine gold. His face resembled lightning and his eyes lamps of fire. Daniel's companions saw nothing, but they began to tremble and fled in fear. God's purpose was to reveal part of what would befall the covenant people in the future. Persia was withstanding Him but Michael was helping Him in the matter (Michael was a created angel, as we see from Daniel 10:5,13,18-21). The Greeks were to overthrow the Persians; one reason for this was that Greek was to become the common language of the Empire; after Christ's Resurrection this would make it easier for the gospel to spread rapidly. Daniel was left puzzled about the future of God's cause, but was given the appropriate instruction, "Go thy way till the end be; for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days" (Daniel 12:13).

In Amos 7, the prophet tells how he saw the Angel in human form, in a vision, standing on a wall with a plumb line. He was measuring Israel spiritually, and they came short. In chapter 9 we read of Amos seeing the Angel standing on the altar pronouncing woes against Israel.

In Zechariah 1, the Angel is seen riding on a horse, repeating the covenant promises to His people. He was surrounded by created angels on horses, as if going out to war for the Church in her low state. In chapter 3, Zechariah sees Joshua the high priest – representing God's people – being accused by Satan before the Angel of the Lord and dressed in filthy clothing. The Angel rebuked Satan, and caused Joshua to be clothed in white instead of in his rags. This again points to the finished work of Christ and its cleansing results. Most of the rest of the Book of Zechariah is taken up in pointing to the Lord, who was soon to come for the work of salvation.

God said through Malachi: "Behold, I will send My messenger, and He shall prepare the way before Me; and the Lord whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in" (3:1). For 400 years the voice of prophecy was to be silent, with theophany unknown. But then the Messenger was to come to do the Father's will in the work of salvation. When Christ eventually took a true human nature, He was both the Messenger and the message. He revealed salvation and revealed the Father, who sent Him. The Old and New Testaments come together in Christ. The covenant Messenger and the Saviour are one.

Wilkins

Wilkins did not believe the Bible. In fact, he scoffed at religion and boasted that he had never been in a place of worship for 30 years.

John Ashworth, who lived in the same north-of-England town, Rochdale, became concerned for Wilkins' soul. He called on one of Wilkins' daughters to suggest that her father should meet a Mr Molineux, a retired minister who was one of Ashworth's friends. As she expected, Wilkins turned angry when she told him, so angry that he went to Ashworth's shop to complain about what he had done. Ashworth handled him calmly; he just asked him to sit down and offered to take his hat and walking stick. Very reluctantly, Wilkins sat down but held on to his hat, and the way he grasped his stick suggested he might use it as a weapon. Ashworth assured him that Molineux would talk to him on all sorts of interesting subjects. Wilkins agreed to meet Molineux, but on one condition – that he would leave out what Wilkins called “his religious twaddle”. Ashworth was happy to accept these terms; he knew Wilkins would be the first to refer to religion. “You have been”, he said, “so long under the impression that you could prove all ministers fools that you will be trying your hand on him”. Only then did Wilkins realise that he had agreed to meet a minister. Ashworth offered to release him from his agreement, but Wilkins replied: “No, no, let him come. You know the terms – no religious cant. If the bargain is kept, I shall be glad of his company.”

Wilkins and Molineux agreed to see each other every week. For several weeks they talked about plants and politics. And, as Ashworth expected, Wilkins was the first to speak about religion; he asked Molineux what he thought about the evidence for a great First Cause, a being who is the cause of everything that exists – in other words, God. Wilkins went on to claim that, if the Bible had come from an infinitely wise Being, such as God must be, it would not have what he called “many absurdities and contradictions”.

So Molineux asked: “Have you found the absurdities and contradictions in your own reading of the Bible, or in books written against it?”

“O, in books written against it. I have never read either the Old or New Testaments myself, thinking it a pure waste of time to do so.”

Molineux suggested that, to be fair, Wilkins should have read books on the side of the Bible, even if he refused to read the Bible itself. “Yes, perhaps I ought,” Wilkins admitted. He had often boasted that he thought for himself, but in fact he had allowed the enemies of the Bible to do his thinking for him. He now asked Molineux to lend him some suitable books, and promised: “As the New Testament is a small book, I will at once read it carefully through”. But he did not expect, he said, to understand what was said about Jesus.

Before Molineux had the opportunity to pass on a few books, Wilkins began to read the New Testament carefully, making notes as he went along. He was looking for contradictions and absurd statements, but he found instead that the Word of God is powerful. Sharper than any two-edged sword, it was piercing deeply into his conscience. He saw that, if what he was reading in the Bible was true, he was a lost sinner. He was no longer able to sleep; he was going on his knees in the middle of the night, with tears falling from his eyes, asking God to pardon his sins. He was pleading with God not to send him to hell, not to cut him off in his sins, not to turn a deaf ear to him, but in mercy to save him, in mercy to blot out his transgressions.

One day, he came to Ashworth's house, wanting to talk to him privately. Apart from many other serious sins, he was specially troubled because he had led others to reject the Bible and its teachings – one man especially. When Wilkins visited him in his last hours, this man pleaded with him to send for some good man to read the Bible with them and pray. Wilkins called him a fool; he told him to die like a man; and he refused to send for a praying man or to allow anyone else to do so. "O Wilkins, Wilkins," said the man, "Christians do not die as I am dying. This will never do; I do not now believe that death is an eternal sleep. I wish I could believe it. We have often called it a leap in the dark, but now to me it is dreadfully dark." And as Wilkins thought back over the tragic scene, with tears streaming down his face he confessed that if he had read the New Testament without prejudice 30 years earlier, he would have been a different man. As he left the house, he shook Ashworth's hand and told him: "I do believe God *could* pardon my sins, but He never will".

The next time Ashworth saw him, Wilkins was calmer, but he spoke forcefully about the sinful lives of the men whose unbelieving writings he used to trust absolutely. Now he lamented his past life; he wished he had read the Bible sooner and had thought for himself. Ashworth encouraged his new, broken-hearted friend to go on reading the Bible, to pray for the help of the Holy Spirit, and to be on his own as much as possible.

"Yes," Wilkins answered, "but how am I either to read or pray with any hope of pardon? The thing seems to me impossible. The fearful results of my teachings are more and more terrible as I now see them. I have already given great offence by allowing Mr Molineux to come and see me. My family now mock all my attempts to bring them to reconsider their position. They sneer at me for reading the Bible and make clear they are determined not to be frightened by religious bugbears."

Wilkins had a godly neighbour, whose name was Todd. He offered to let Wilkins use his sitting-room whenever he wanted. Indeed he offered to read

and pray with Wilkins 50 times a day if he wished. So Wilkins made full use of Todd's sitting-room and there they often read and prayed together.

One evening Wilkins sent a message asking Ashworth to spend the evening with him. "It was a memorable evening," Ashworth recalled; "he had copied from the Bible many passages that seemed to destroy all hope that a man such as he was could ever expect to have forgiveness. And he read them to me with a trembling voice. I met all his objections by one answer: 'He [Christ] is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him'. I held him fast to that one point: able to save to the uttermost."

Wilkins asked Ashworth to pray for him, and they went down on their knees before God. But before Ashworth could say one word, Wilkins in tears burst out: "O Jesus, Jesus, Lamb of God, have mercy on me. O Jesus, Jesus, how I have scorned and despised Thy very name, scorned and insulted Thy servants, mocked Thy sufferings and death! O Jesus, Jesus, Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world, have mercy on me. Lord, I would believe; help Thou my unbelief. I know I have sinned in heart and life millions of times; but is there not mercy? Is there not mercy? O Lamb of God, have mercy on a poor guilty man."

Wilkins spent that night in earnest prayer. But, at last, joy sprang up in his heart, and his joy was equal to the bitterness he had endured over the past weeks. "He wept", said Ashworth, "and sought and at last found the grace of God through a crucified Redeemer. And O the joy that sprang up in his heart when he found that his deeply-stained and guilty soul was washed in the blood of the Lamb!" When he next met Ashworth, he took him by the hand and told him with real earnestness: "O how happy I am; the blood of Christ can save. He has saved me, the chief of sinners. By faith I saw Him nailed on the cross for me. In my heart I believed He died for me, that His blood was shed for me, and now I am a sinner saved by grace. And if Christ could save me, He can save any man out of hell. I have had more real peace since I became a child of God than I ever possessed in all my days of sin."

Another time, he told Ashworth that he had been disturbed by reading in the Bible that we must all stand before the judgement seat of Christ to give an account of the deeds done in the body, whether they be good or bad. "If this is true," he asked, "what must I do? My life has been spent in the service of Satan; I am now getting old, and I cannot do much for God in the time that remains. If we must be judged by works, what must I do, for I shall have nothing to show?"

Ashworth pointed Wilkins to God's redeeming grace and told him "that a life of iniquity could be pardoned through faith in Christ, that a conscience laden with guilt could be made the home of peace and joy, that grey-headed

sinners could be made saints". He added: "You are a brand plucked from the burning; you have been brought into the vineyard at the eleventh hour, but you will have your penny [see Matthew 20:1-16], and for such great mercies you must wonder and adore".

Wilkins' wish was that his last words in this life would be: "Blessed Jesus". When Ashworth came to see him on the last day of his life, the dying man asked his visitor to lift him higher in bed. Ashworth did so and then Wilkins whispered: "Blessed Jesus. Blessed Jesus." Immediately his spirit passed away to spend eternity adoring the great mercies of God in Christ Jesus.

How Did it all Begin?

5. Mutations and Their Effects

Have you ever seen a picture of a snake with two heads, or a cat with four ears, or a calf with five legs? What would you think if you did see any of these things? A bit freaky? Possibly. Rare and unusual? Definitely!

In the last article we looked at natural selection, at how the environment can influence the genetic information passed on to the next generation. Evolutionists see this process of natural selection as one of the main ways by which evolution acts. However, if a simple organism is to evolve into one which is more complex, then new genetic information is necessary. This is where evolutionists bring *mutations* into the discussion (mutations are the changes in the genes which, they claim, would introduce this new information). The evolutionists argue that simple organisms develop and become more complex by a combination of natural selection and mutations. They try to explain how mutations bring about the new features of the more complex organism. The unusual animal specimens mentioned at the start of this article are all examples of mutations.

So, for instance, someone who believes in evolution might try to explain how wings came to exist. Imagine a tree dwelling animal with four limbs, he might say, which jumps from branch to branch. These animals breed and produce offspring, but one of their offspring has a random mutation causing webbing between the "fingers" of its upper limbs. Natural selection favours this mutation because the webbing gives the animal the advantage of increased air resistance when jumping from tree to tree. As a result the animal catches more food and is therefore stronger and fitter, breeds more and produces more offspring, which also have webbed forelimbs. Then another "random" mutation occurs which gives one of these "webbed" creatures the additional feature of longer forelimbs. Natural selection favours

this new feature because the longer, webbed forelimbs enable the creature to reach further, providing more air resistance to reduce fatal falls and “so on by insensibly graded steps until, hundreds of generations later, we arrive at full wings”.

The quote is from Richard Dawkins, a Professor at Oxford University who aggressively promotes evolution at every opportunity. There is no scientific evidence for these “insensibly graded steps”; so this explanation of how wings were formed would have to be accepted on the basis of faith.

Mutations result in a loss or downgrade of genetic information. The effects produced by mutations can be negative, neutral or positive, depending on the circumstances. Most mutations have a negative outcome, as in albinism, sickle-cell anaemia, cystic fibrosis, and many other medical conditions.

An example of a neutral mutation – a mutation which is neither an advantage or a disadvantage for the organism, might be the calf’s fifth leg. It is no way an advantage to the calf – it is a useless extra limb. Does it involve new genetic information? No, it involves only an extra copy of information which was already there.

The case of the wingless beetle on windy islands is an example which evolutionists often give of a positive mutation when they try to show that mutations result in evolution. The beetles cannot fly and therefore are not swept out to sea by the wind. This is an advantage to the beetle on the windy island, so the wingless beetle thrives there. However, the wingless beetle would not necessarily have an advantage over its winged counterparts somewhere else, if the beetle had to fly to escape from its enemies or to find other food sources. Is there new genetic information? No, the beetle no longer has the genetic information to form wings, so there is actually a loss of information. This is certainly not a step forward in what is seen as the evolutionary ladder. The fact that occasionally there is some positive benefit from a mutation does not mean that there is new genetic information.

Evolutionists believe that, occasionally, a “good” mutation will occur, adding new genetic information to the organism with the mutation, and that natural selection will ensure this “new genetic information” passes on to the next generation. This creature’s offspring will also have the mutation and will progress along the evolutionary pathway with further random mutations until a new species is eventually formed with new and more complex genetic information. Evolutionists cannot provide any evidence that small random mutations gradually build on each other to form new complex organs. There is plenty of speculation about it but, as we know, speculation is not scientific evidence. After producing several well-written pages of theories about mutations, Richard Dawkins wrote, “This is the kind of speculation in

which we should indulge only as a last resort". But it is their only resort!

Mutations change genetic information by deleting or corrupting it. They do not add new genetic information. Dr Carl Wieland, a writer for the Answers in Genesis organisation, has written many books and articles about creation; he states, "Particles-to-people evolution requires so many information-increasing mutations, that it should be easy to find such mutations happening today, and we have yet to observe even one".

Sin entered God's perfect creation through Adam and we see and feel the consequences of it every day. Mutations are one of these consequences. We cannot rid ourselves of the effects of sin in the world around us, but there is a remedy for us as individuals. We should pray along with David: "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10).

S M Campbell

For Junior Readers

Who Would You Prefer to Be with?

What company do you choose to keep? I know that, sometimes, you do not have any choice. When you attend school, you have to mix with worldly people.

When you go to God's house, you meet with other church people. But who would you prefer to be with? I hope you would prefer to be with God's people – with people who seek to live according to the Bible.

There may be times when you feel all alone. Perhaps all the boys and girls you know are meeting up; perhaps they are all going to some worldly entertainment. In your heart you know it is wrong. But you feel so alone – as if you are the only one in the whole world who is different from the crowd.

What about Elijah? When he was on Mount Carmel, he was all alone. He was the only prophet of God – all alone facing 450 prophets of Baal. He was different from the crowd.

But he was right. He was the only one who was right. Do you remember what he said to God later: "I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life to take it away"? And what did the Lord tell him? "Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him". So you should not feel alone either. Even if you are, you will not be the loser if God is on your side.

Think about Daniel. Perhaps he was the only one in the land of Babylon to pray publicly to God. He was not ashamed to be seen on his knees in prayer even though he was breaking a law of the land. And you know how

the Lord specially protected him and saved him from death. “Dare to be a Daniel, dare to stand alone,” however difficult it may be at times.

A good prayer for you to remember at times like that is, “Gather not my soul with sinners” (Psalm 26:9). Surely you do not wish your soul to be gathered with sinners on the Day of Judgement and cast into a lost eternity with them. Well, pray that the Lord will keep you from gathering with sinners now in time, from following their bad example, from their bad language, and from “following a multitude to do evil”.

Think of the advice Solomon gives in the Book of Proverbs. Think of it as if it was given to you personally: “My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. If they say, Come with us . . . walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path; for their feet run to evil”. How much better to say with the Psalmist, “I am a companion of all them that fear Thee, and of them that keep Thy precepts”.

For Younger Readers

What We All Need

Why do you wash your hands before a meal? Why might you wash your face after eating? Why have a bath or a shower?

It is because you get dirty and the water washes all the dirt away. It makes you clean again.

But do you know that your soul needs to be made clean?

First you may want to ask, What is my soul? It is the part of you that you cannot see. You can see your feet and your hands. And if you look in a mirror, you can even see your face. You know what your body is; you can see it.

But your soul is the part of you that thinks. It needs to be cleaned, just as your body does. But why? Because of all the bad things that you think. It is what the Bible calls sin. And it is because you think sinful things that you say sinful things and do sinful things.

So we need to be made clean. It is only God who can do that for us. That is why David asked God: “Cleanse me from my sin”. He wanted God to change him, and so to keep him from sinning.

That is what we all need – to be made clean. It is only God who can change us and keep us from thinking what is sinful and saying what is sinful and doing what is sinful. That is why, like David, we should all ask God: “Cleanse me from my sin”.

Open the Young Man's Eyes

C H Spurgeon

A chapter, based on 2 Kings 6:17, abridged from the book *A Good Start*.

We pray that our friends would have their eyes opened to see the many disguises the devil takes on. We fear many are ignorant of his devices; they mistake the great enemy of their souls for a friend. They believe his false and flattering words and are seduced to ruin. He holds forth to them the sparkling cup; but death lurks in its bubbles. He talks of pleasure; but in the lusts of the flesh the pleasure is a shadow, and misery is the substance. He wears the mask of prudence, and advises young men to "mind the main chance", and leave religion till they have made their fortunes; but the gain which results from thrusting God aside will prove to be everlasting loss.

The devil as a serpent does more mischief than as a roaring lion. If we had to meet the devil, we may far more easily conquer him if we recognise him for what he is. But when we have to deal with him disguised as an angel of light, we need a hundred eyes, each one of them opened by God. Even worse, at times he does not meet us at all, but he digs pits for our feet; he shoots his arrows from afar, or sends forth a plague which walks in darkness. Then we need better sight than nature gives. For the young man who is just leaving home to go into the world, I would pray like Elisha: "O Lord, open the eyes of the young man, that he may see!" May he be able to detect the falsehood which hides beneath the truth, the meanness which wraps itself about with pride, the folly which robes itself in learning, the sin which dresses itself in the garment of pleasure! I do not want you to be caught, like birds, in a snare. I do not want the youth to be led by the hand of temptation, like a bullock to the slaughterhouse. Let us breathe such a prayer as Elisha's for everyone who is beginning life. God grant that his eyes may be opened to see sin as sin, and to see that evil never can be good, and a lie never can be true, and rebellion against God can never be the way to happiness!

We want people's eyes to be opened to see that God is everywhere, observing all things. What an opening of the eyes this would be to many! Sadly, although God may be seen everywhere, most men see Him nowhere. He is blind indeed who cannot see Him to whom the sun owes its light. Until our eyes are opened, we rise in the morning and fall asleep at night without having seen God all day – although He has been around us every moment. While the Lord never ceases to see us, we do not even begin to see Him till, by a miracle of grace, He opens our eyes.

We live in a wonderful world which the great Creator has made, which He has filled with His own works and cheered with His own presence, yet we

do not see Him. Indeed some are so blind as to assert that there is no Creator, and that they cannot see any evidence of a supremely wise and mighty Creator. O that the Lord Jesus would open the eyes of the wilfully blind! O that you also who are blinded by forgetfulness, rather than by error, may be made to cry with Hagar, "Thou God seest me"; and with Job, "Now mine eye seeth Thee"! If God will graciously convince men of His own presence, what a blessing it will be to them, especially to the young beginning life! To see clearly that the Lord observes all that we do will be a very useful protection in the hour of temptation. When we remember God's eye, we shall cry, like Joseph, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" To see yourself is well, but to see God is better. Let us pray, "O Lord, open the young man's eyes, that he may see *Thee!*"

When someone begins to see his great enemy and his best Friend, we may next pray, "Lord, open his eyes to see the way of salvation through the appointed Saviour". No one can see the Lord Jesus but by His light. We look *to* Him with a look which comes *from* Him. I have tried to explain salvation simply to people many a time, but there is a great deal more needed than an explanation. It is right to be very plain; but more is needed than a clear statement. No matter how bright the candle, a blind man sees none the better. I continually pray, "Lord, open my mouth!" But I must also pray, "Lord, open men's eyes!" Until God opens a man's eyes, he will not see what faith means, nor what atonement means, nor what regeneration means. What is perfectly plain to someone who sees is invisible to the blind.

"Believe, and live"; what can be plainer? Yet no one understands it till God gives grace to see what He means. It is our duty as preachers to put the gospel as plainly as possible; but we cannot give anyone spiritual understanding. We declare: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved"; but people ask, "What do you mean?" We cry, "Look to Jesus and live", but they mistake our meaning and go on looking to themselves and turning their backs on the Lord Jesus. To believe, or trust, is no mystery, but the simplest of simplicities; and for that very reason people cannot be persuaded to think that we mean what we say, or that God means what He says.

We must pray: "Lord, open their eyes, that they may see; for seeing, they do not see; and hearing, they do not perceive!" Blessed be the Lord, how well they do see it the moment their eyes are opened by His own all-powerful touch! Then they wonder that they did not see it before, and call themselves fools for not perceiving what is so plain. Faith in the Lord Jesus is the ABC of heavenly knowledge, and we are fools indeed not to take it as we find it in the Word. If God by His power opens our eyes, we see well enough; but till then we grope as in bright sunshine for what is right in front of us. Sin

cannot so darken the mind but God can pour light into it. If we cannot make men see, we can at least lead them to God, who can rectify their sight.

We should pray that our friends may have their eyes opened to see every kind of spiritual truth. We should be thankful that our eyes can see as much as they do; but they cannot discern spiritual objects. God must give us spiritual senses before we can discern spiritual things; let this never be forgotten. The flesh cannot grasp the things of the Spirit. We must become spiritual, and receive spiritual ability before we can perceive spiritual things. In a word, we must be "born again". "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Hence the need of the prayer, "Lord, open Thou the eyes of the young man, that he may see!"

Already the horses and chariots of fire were round about Elisha; but his servant could not see one of them, because they were spiritual chariots and spiritual horses – angels. As yet the youth had no eyes with which to see into the spiritual region. When God had given him spiritual eyes, he began to discern that strange sight which revived his soul with the conviction that the prophet was safe; like an army, with horses and chariots, these servants of God showed themselves strong for the defence of Jehovah's servant. How surprised he was! He and his master were beyond all fear of danger.

Strangers to the things of God, if the Lord would open your eyes at once, you would be astonished indeed. As yet you have no idea – you cannot have any idea – what spiritual realities are until the Lord will give you new life. You may talk about spiritual subjects and think you are theologians, but you resemble deaf people criticising music, and blind people describing pictures. You are not qualified even to express an opinion upon the matter till you are created anew in Christ Jesus. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Let the prayer go up, then, from all enlightened hearts for those who do not yet walk in the light: "Lord, open the eyes of the young men, that they may see!"

Elisha's prayer for the young man was not that he might do what he could already do, that he might use some faculty which he already possessed. So our prayer for others is that a new power of sight may be granted to them, and a new nature created within them, by a power altogether beyond themselves. We ask the Lord to work a marvel. We want you to obtain what no years of experience or of study can achieve; we want you to possess what no imitation of other people will gain for you; we want you to experience a change which only the Lord Himself can work in you. We would have you pass from nature's darkness into God's marvellous light, from an awful blindness to see things clearly which are otherwise invisible.

Four Little Words

This book for young people is now available in a new edition from Free Presbyterian Publications. Edited by Rev A McPherson, it was originally published as *Pages from the Past*. All the articles were taken from past issues of this magazine, but for this reprint some more of Mr McPherson's own writings have been added. There are many interesting stories, one of which was printed again in the *Young People's Magazine* for January. This 96-page book now has a much more durable binding than before and costs £6.95. You can buy it from the Free Presbyterian Bookroom and elsewhere.

Looking Around Us

A Rush to Be Rich

Twelve times as many people as normal were buying tickets for the Euro-Millions lottery ahead of the draw at the beginning of February. This was because no one had won the jackpot for several weeks and the main prize on offer had soared to £125 million. In the end, there were three winners, one in Portugal and two in France, each getting a cheque for about £42 million.

As the most expensive house in Scotland cost about £2 million, each of the winners could have bought around 20 such mansions. This amount of money is so large that no one should know how to spend it all. Yet large numbers of people were desperate to buy tickets in the hope of winning the big prize, although there was, to put it mildly, only a slim chance of winning. Many of them probably bought several tickets with money they could not afford, for this tiny chance of gaining money they could not reasonably hope to spend. This is sheer greed. And it is sinful.

Indeed all gambling is sinful; it is taking money one has not earned merely on the basis of some chance choice. The Bible tells us that "the lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord" (Proverbs 16:33), yet God is not acknowledged. Indeed another verse says, "He that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent" (Proverbs 28:20). Gambling, especially on the scale of the EuroMillions lottery, is a rush to be rich and must involve sin. On the other hand, the same verse promises: "A faithful man shall abound with blessings". Let us be content with God's blessing.

Scripture and Catechism Exercises

The Editor apologises for the wrong address being given last month for the Junior Section. Answers should be sent to Mrs Sutherland at *Inchure, Saval Road, Lairg, Sutherland, IV27 4ED*.

Youth Conference 2006

Arrangements

Venue: Strathallan School, Forgandenny, Perthshire.

Dates: Tuesday, April 4, to Thursday, April 6.

Chairman: Rev D A Ross.

Lower Age Limit: 16 years old.

Applications: To Rev D A Ross, F P Manse, Laide, Ross-shire, IV22 2NB, *as soon as possible* (the closing date is March 24). See the February issue for an application form. The fee will be £36 for applicants in full-time employment and £18 for others. Cheques are payable to the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland.

Programme

Tuesday, April 4

2.30 pm

A Wrestler with God and Man

Lessons from the Life of Jacob

by Rev A Smith

7.00 pm

Running the Race

What the Bible Teaches About the Christian Life

by Rev Neil M Ross

Wednesday, April 5

9.30 am

“Chosen not for Good in Me”

The Life and Ministry of Robert Murray M‘Cheyne

by Mr A MacLean

1.30 pm

Church History in Southern Perthshire

A Tour conducted by Rev D W B Somerset

7.30 pm

Grace to Live in Killing Times

The Covenanters of South-West Scotland in the 1680s

by Rev Roderick MacLeod

Thursday, April 6

9.30 am

The Sabbath

Why Should We Keep It?

by Rev Donald Macdonald

Further information will be sent to each applicant about a week before the conference. If you have any queries, do not hesitate to phone Mr Ross (tel: 01445 731340). But please do *not* delay sending in your application.