

The Young People's Magazine

**Issued by the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland
Reformed in Doctrine, Worship and Practice**

“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



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Storm and Shipwreck

Some months ago, someone asked me why Acts 27 is in the Bible. This is the chapter that tells us about Paul's long voyage from Caesarea, in Palestine, through the Mediterranean Sea. Paul was a prisoner – he calls himself a prisoner of Jesus Christ, because his fearless preaching of the Saviour lay behind his arrest. The voyage was meant to take him to Rome, because he had been forced to appeal to Caesar, the head of the Roman Empire, in the hope of being set free again. But after sailing through very stormy weather for at least a fortnight, Paul was shipwrecked.

There are many other parts of the Bible which tell us what happened to various individuals, to armies and to nations, when perhaps we might expect instead to find more teaching about God and His ways. But one reason for all these historical accounts is to show us clearly that what we are told in the Bible is very much part of history. It is all absolutely true. Again, there are always lessons to be learned from these parts of the Bible. So let us try to learn some lessons from Acts 27.

1. What a blessing it was for the sailors and others in the ship that Paul was there – someone who, we can be sure, prayed for them all, not just for himself. When God answered his prayers, he was told: "God hath *given* thee all them that sail with thee". In other words, their lives would be spared. They would be given to Paul because he had asked for them in prayer.

It is a great blessing to have someone who will pray for you. Those of you who have praying parents should be very thankful, especially when you are in difficult circumstances. Even if you are still careless about your soul, you should be thankful if your parents or other friends are praying for you. But make sure that you pray for yourself.

2. Life may not be easy, even for the most godly of people. Paul was one of the godliest men that ever lived, yet he had to face very great difficulties during his Christian life. Besides the difficult voyage, the shipwreck and the imprisonment recorded in Acts 27, he had to face serious opposition many times. Sometimes that opposition turned violent: he was stoned; he was whipped; and at last he was executed.

But none of these things moved him away from following the Lord Jesus. Jesus had warned His disciples: "In the world ye shall have tribulation". This may involve a series of serious trials, such as Paul experienced; or they may turn out to be less difficult. But Jesus added, "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). So, however difficult believers' circumstances may be, they are to seek to be cheerful, because Jesus is with them. Not only will He be with them throughout life's difficulties, they will be with Him for ever in a blessed eternity. Yet, in difficult circumstances, it is only by faith that they can keep hold of the fact that Jesus is with them.

But do not think that you can escape trouble by staying away from Christ. You will still meet difficult circumstances in this life, and there is a dreadful eternity ahead of you. So seek Christ now.

3. God answered Paul's prayers. Everyone got safely off the ship. It was not easy to get ashore. Those who could, swam; the others got onto dry land on boards or on broken pieces of the ship. "And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land" (verse 44). As Paul told the Galatians, we are not to "be weary in well doing" (6:9); so we most certainly should not become weary of prayer.

4. Just as Paul suffered shipwreck, so godly people today may be involved in, for instance, a car crash. Sometimes they may feel forced to conclude that God was chastising them because of some sin in their lives, and they may well be right. But, on the other hand, it may be a trial of their faith. Paul had no need to conclude that God was chastising him by the storm and shipwreck; for although he was by no means free from sin, he was consistent in seeking to lead a godly life.

5. God encouraged Paul. He sent an angel to say, "Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar [Paul would not perish in the storm]: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee" (verse 24). Everyone, he could now be sure, would be safe. God does not send angels with such messages to believers today; we now have a complete Bible. So believers can rest themselves on the sure promises they find there – on, for instance, God's words in Hebrews 13:5: "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee". Thus God encourages His people today, for He will never break His promises. Everything in His Word is always true and sure.

6. Paul gave thanks to God. When he and others – probably the soldiers on board and the crew – had what was probably a final meal before they were shipwrecked, he "gave thanks to God in presence of them all" (verse 35). He would certainly have thanked God for providing the food they were going to eat and probably also for the promise of being brought safely ashore – as he told the men: "There shall not an hair fall from the head of any of

you” (verse 34). So we should always say grace at mealtimes and thank Him for every other blessing He gives us, especially spiritual blessings. And we should not despise Him by neglecting the salvation that He sets before us.

7. Paul acknowledged that he was a servant of God. The day after the angel appeared to him, Paul told those on the ship what the angel had said and acknowledged that he belonged to God and served Him. “Whose I am, and whom I serve,” he told them. He is an example to God’s children today in this also. But let them be sure that their lives point in the same direction as their words: towards God. We can be sure that this was true of Paul; this was the man who said, “Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men” (Acts 24:16). Again and again, let us ask God to keep us, in our hearts and in our outward lives, so that we would always want to do God’s will as His servants.

8. God is in control of everything that happens. Paul knew that God could have given them a smooth passage all the way to Italy. But He did not, and Paul no doubt realised that He had very good reasons for making things turn out as they did. That was why Paul had written, “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God” (Romans 8:28). This is how we are to look at God’s providence in our lives today if we are believers: God will work everything for our good, however difficult many of our experiences may be. But if we are not believers, let us ask God that, in His merciful providence, He would save our souls. Let us seek the Lord earnestly while He may be found.

It was because Paul knew that God was in control of everything that he could encourage everyone, telling them that they would get safely ashore. Yet he went on to say what seemed to contradict his earlier words: he warned the soldiers that they must stay on the ship till the end; otherwise they would perish. The way that God fulfilled his promise of safety was by making the soldiers take Paul’s warning seriously. God never contradicts Himself, although that may sometimes *seem* to be the case. God is in control of everything, but He is not in any way responsible for any of the sins that we human beings commit. This may be difficult for us to understand, but God and His ways of working are far above what our little minds can take in. Let us believe what God is saying to us in the Bible and submit to Him and to what He says.

There are no doubt other lessons to be found in this chapter. But these should be enough to convince us that it is a valuable part of Scripture. Every part of Scripture history has lessons to teach us, though sometimes it may be more difficult to find them than at other times. But let us always seek grace to apply these lessons to our own lives.

The Bible's Teaching on Repentance

4. The Hope of Mercy

Charles Hodge

Last month's article in this series pointed out the difference between true repentance and mere remorse, when one is only concerned about the consequences of sin. The series is taken, with editing, from *The Way of Life*.

We can have no hope of being forgiven unless it is founded on what God has revealed in the Bible; and the Bible tells us that God pardons only because of what Jesus Christ has done. So when the soul takes a view of the plan of salvation, it must include the Saviour, however indistinct that view may be. The repenting sinner may not know how God can be just and yet the justifier of sinners; yet he is persuaded, not only that God is merciful, but that God has found a ransom and can save him from going down into the pit.

Under the light of the gospel, the soul sees the mercy of God and the possibility of pardon in the face of Jesus Christ. It is in Him that God has revealed Himself as reconciled to sinners, not imputing their trespasses to them. It is because He was made sin for sinners that we can be made the righteousness of God in Him. All true hope rests on the assurance that there is an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. This is the hope which is effectual in winning the soul back to God. The soul discovers the love of God in giving His own Son, that whosoever believes on Him should not perish but have eternal life.

This is what breaks the hard heart, revealing to it the terrible wickedness of its sins. At the same time it makes known how ready God is to forgive freely those who come to Him through Christ. It is not the threatenings of the law that turn the sinner from his rebellion and bring him to submit and obey, but seeing the love of God.

Without this, all repentance is slavish. It is like that of Pharaoh or Judas or the thousands whom an awakened conscience and fear of wrath drive from their former sins. These people then force themselves to walk in clanking chains along a mistaken road in search of heaven. This is the only repentance which conscience can produce. No one can approach an unreconciled God, any more than one can embrace a consuming fire. If we are to return to Him with confidence and love, we must have a sense of His favour or a hope in His mercy.

There is indeed a belief in the mercy of God which encourages people to continue in sin instead of leading them to repentance. This belief arises out of ignorance, out of a wrong view of the character of God. It is easy for those who know nothing of God's holiness and justice, and look on sin as a

trifle, to believe that God will not be so severe as to mark iniquity. To them the mercy of God seems a matter of course, believing that it will cover everyone's sins, whether they repent or not. They see no reason why God should not forgive; so they readily hope in His mercy.

But suppose their eyes are opened to see His spotless purity, which prevents Him looking lightly on sin. Let them see that His justice forbids Him to spare the guilty; let them see the strictness of His law and its fearful penalty. Then conscience is aroused and it confirms God's judgement; the sinner cannot avoid its voice. These hopes of mercy are now seen to be as a spider's web, swept away in a moment.

Now the difficulty is to believe that pardon is possible. That is why the Bible so often and so earnestly assures us that God is plenteous in mercy and ready to forgive. That is why the way of salvation is so clearly set out. That is why invitations and promises – even the oath of God – are given: to awaken hope in the mind of the convinced and humbled sinner. It is not the whole, but the sick, who need the physician; assurances are not given for the careless, who feel no need of pardon, but for those who fear that there is scarcely room for mercy.

The hope of mercy that acts in repentance is not one which springs from ignorance and carelessness, but one founded on God's promises and embraced by faith. The soul that has this hope knows something about the difficulties in the way of pardon. Such a hope is not easy to attain. A sense of sin, the testimony of conscience, the holiness of God, the honour of His law, all seem opposed to expecting forgiveness.

Although Scripture is so clear on the subject, the awakened sinner often feels that the Bible cannot be speaking about himself though he accepts that these declarations may be true for others. But when he sees God's love overcoming all difficulties, no shipwrecked seaman is happier to see the break of day than is such a soul to see the revelation of divine mercy. But wonder, gratitude and love also take possession of his soul and he wants to live a life devoted to his Redeemer. This is the hope that gives new life to the soul, and brings it from serving sin to serving God.

Since hope in God's mercy is so important, it is a great purpose of the Bible to reveal His love to sinners, to bring them back from their rebellion. The Bible is full of teaching on this important subject. Whenever God commands sinners to repent, it implies that He is ready to forgive. Every time pardon is mentioned in the Bible it shows that there is forgiveness with God that He may be feared. In the same way, the Scriptures abound with what He has declared about His mercy, long-suffering and love.

Above all, God set forth His Son as a sacrifice for sin, so that we may see,

not only that He is merciful, but how He can be merciful *and* just. Offers of mercy are made to all who hear the gospel, even to those whose sins are as scarlet, or red like crimson. Many wilfully and wickedly reject these offers; they either suppose that they do not need forgiveness, or they unbelievably refuse to accept pardon on the only terms on which it can be granted.

As Happy as a King

John Ashworth was spending a weekend in Oldham. Early on the Sabbath morning he went out in the hope of persuading some of those hanging about the streets to go to a place of worship. As he walked down Union Street, he saw a little cottage whose windows were filled with cigars, tobacco, fruit, sweets and also leaflets opposing religion. It was open and a woman was on her knees washing the doorstep. He stooped down and asked her: "My good woman, have you any money in the Savings Bank?"

The woman rose up with the floorcloth in her hand, looked Ashworth in the face, and said, "Whatever made you ask me that?"

He explained that for 20 years he had been asking that question of many who had their shops open on Sabbaths, and had never found one that had saved anything. "They are all a poor, poverty-stricken lot," he said, "and I am anxious to know if you are like the rest I have seen."

The woman admitted that they had saved nothing. Just then a tall, thin man came across the street and looked fiercely at Ashworth. Assuming that Ashworth was a minister, the man said he wished he could choke every minister, "so that they could never speak again". Then he introduced himself: "My name is Emmott, a well-known secularist of 30 years' standing". He believed in a secular world, assuming that all religion is false.

Ashworth told him that now he was not surprised that Emmott kept his shop open on Sabbaths and wanted to strangle ministers.

"Say what you will," Emmott told him, "I shall keep this little shop open when I like, and I have a good reason for keeping it open on the Sunday, and I can clinch it with an argument you cannot touch."

"What is that?" Ashworth asked.

"I can make about two shillings out of the goods in that window today, and two shillings are two shillings."

Ashworth warned him: "You sell these cigars and tobacco to mere boys, helping them to form degrading habits, and thereby injuring your neighbours' children. The consequence will be that respectable people will not trade with you any day . . . Despise and snub society, and it will despise and snub you;

respect and smile at it and it will respect and smile at you. To make this more clear, did you ever see a six-foot looking glass?"

"Yes, many a one."

"Well, the next time you see one, stand before it, clench your fist and, with a look of defiance, say, Who cares for you? And you will see one with clenched fist and defiant look saying, Who cares for you? But if you smile and say, Good morning, my friend, I wish you prosperity, you will see one smiling in return, and wishing you prosperity."

As they spoke, they went inside. Emmott folded his arms; he seemed deep in thought. Then looking at his wife, he said, "Do you hear what this man says, lass? I think there is some weight in it, for I have been snubbing and defying society for the last 30 years, and it has nearly snubbed us both into the workhouse" – a most unattractive place where the poorest of the poor had to live. "I think I will try smiling", Emmott went on and he swept all the toffee, tobacco, cigars, and secularist papers out of the window and put them on top of the mangle. Then he pulled down the blind, as his wife stared at him astonished.

Ashworth fully expected Emmott and his wife to be more successful in their shop if they stayed closed on Sabbaths. But he promised that, if they made less of a profit, he would make it up to them. Then he added, "Now what do you say to going to some place of worship?"

"No, no," Emmott answered. Your looking-glass argument has knocked me down, for I believe it, but no churches or chapels for me. Oldham folks will be amazed enough to see the shop shut up, but they will never see me in a church. I see by the bills on the walls that John Ashworth of Rochdale is going to preach in the chapel at the end of the street. I did think once of going to hear what that chap had to say." He claimed he longed to meet "that meddling fool".

"Well," Ashworth suggested, "if you will get ready, I will call on you about the time, and we will go together."

"No, chapels and churches are not in my line. I wish they were all in ruins."

Soon after Ashworth visited him, Emmott was walking through Oldham park. He watched a lark rising higher and higher, singing as it went, till it became a mere speck in the clear blue sky. He said to himself: "Yon little bird is filled with song and joy, while I am miserable and wretched. . . . How is this? If there is a God, He must have as much regard for my happiness as for the happiness of that bird? That bird sings its song without snubbing or insulting its fellows, or denying its Maker."

Emmott found himself praying that he too might answer the purpose of his existence, and become a happy man. He did so in the words of a verse his

mother had taught him – a mother who had often prayed for her wayward son. The verse began: “Come, Holy Spirit, from above”.

The next Sabbath found Emmott in church. With tears of repentance he sought for mercy and pardon from the One he had insulted, confessing that he was the guiltiest of sinners. He wrote to Ashworth, telling him: “Had it not been that the Lord directed you to my house, I should have been lost. Will you pray for me and, if you can, soon come to see me?”

When Ashworth called, he was very surprised to find Emmott so different. He spoke about his past life. When about 20 Emmott was living in Bradford and gave up religion. Later, in Manchester, he joined a group of men who opposed religion. Probably he joined them in drunkenness. His behaviour became so bad that his wife left him and came to Oldham. He followed her, and joined a similar group of men who called themselves secularists. About this time he was “perfectly savage against everyone professing religion, and took every opportunity of insulting them”. He drove those who sold Bibles out of the market place by mocking everything that they said.

Once when he was sick, his sister asked a minister to come to see him. But he was rude when the minister took out his Bible to read. He confessed, “I never heard a church bell but I wished the ground would open and swallow up all the churches and chapels with the parsons”. He gloated over keeping his shop open on Sabbaths and selling papers opposing religion. But “when my eyes were opened, and I saw how great a sinner I was, I felt greatly troubled about the injury I had done to others by the sale of infidel publications, those passports to ruin, and resolved that not one more should pass through my hands in my house. I gathered them all together, with the books belonging to myself, costing in all about £4 [40 times what he earned in a day]; I piled them on the fire, and, as I saw them consuming in the flames, I felt as if I was burning the devil and watched their destruction with the greatest pleasure. . . . Since this change came over my mind, my home is already like a paradise to what it was. Now I have a quiet, peaceable home.”

Before then, especially on Sabbaths, “it was filled with all sorts of rabble, talking all sorts of wicked, filthy talk, from morning to night. Never was there such a change in a house, and I hope God will have mercy upon me, and pardon my many transgressions, and then it will be a change indeed, it will be bliss here and hereafter.”

Emmott asked for a Bible, wanting to read it day and night. Ashworth was glad to oblige; one true sign of a real change in Emmott's soul, he reckoned, was that “the Book he once mortally hated he now loves”. After a weeknight meeting, Emmott came home in deep distress and for four days prayed for forgiveness. “O Lord,” he asked, “wilt Thou not pardon me? If Thou wilt

not, I cannot be surprised, for I have laughed Thee to scorn, and thousands of times insulted the very name of Thy dear Son that died for sinners. I have indeed been the chief of sinners, but wilt Thou not save me? O do, Lord, do; for Christ's sake, that died for sinners, do save me!" And God heard him.

He wrote to Ashworth: "For a moment I felt as if I had left the earth, and that my spirit was soaring aloft into heaven. I felt my faith to be as strong as Samson. My wife says I am happy as a king, but no king is half so happy. This is the brightest day of my life, and I now truly begin to live, for I am a child of God, bought with the blood of the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world. I hope I shall walk humbly before Him, and daily ask His blessing and grace to guide me, and help me to live at peace with all."

All those who knew Emmott were astonished at his conversion. The news fell like a bombshell among his old secularist companions. Many of them called to see if the report was true. Someone declared, "If I could be as happy as Dick Emmott, I would give all I have, even my donkey and cart".

When Ashworth visited him, Emmott spoke of his deep confidence in God's mercy and love, and his firm conviction that He would sustain him through all the persecution and abuse he would probably suffer from his old friends. As Ashworth read part of Isaiah 53, Emmott was in tears. "What love, what love," he exclaimed, "and all for guilty sinners, for such as me!"

Emmott prayed before they parted: "O Lord, how good Thou art! Never, never can I praise Thee enough for what Thou hast done for me. What a wicked, wicked man I have been; yet Thou, for Jesus Christ's sake, hast forgiven me. I know, I feel Thou hast. Christ did carry my griefs and sorrows; He was bruised for me, and by His stripes I am healed. Do help me to praise Thee. O do help me to praise Thee. And bless all my old companions. Open their dark eyes and show them the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world."

The Unequal Yoke

Rev K M Watkins

It was a strange sight. A very strange sight indeed! The missionaries could hardly believe their eyes. They had to look again, to make sure they were not mistaken. They had often seen pairs of animals yoked together, either hauling logs behind them, or ploughing in the fields. Sometimes it would be two donkeys. At other times it would be two oxen. But coming along the African track towards them that day was a strange pair indeed. It was a donkey and an ox yoked together – in one yoke. The heavy wooden yoke

was far from horizontal, as it sloped from the shoulders of the ox down to the donkey's lower form.

Stranger still, it did not seem to hamper their progress. At least, not to begin with. Yes, it looked most awkward. And the missionaries did wonder if it was uncomfortable for the animals. But they seemed to be accomplishing their task without undue difficulty. It was a wonder how they could possibly get on so well together, the donkey and the ox.

But then the track became difficult – steep and stony. The missionaries thought that things would change now. Sure enough, the different heights and ways of moving became much more obvious. The yoke had never been straight. Now it was on even more of an angle. The animals began to struggle. It became too difficult to make any more progress. However, the owners had been expecting this. They called the animals to a halt, went in front and loosed the yoke. Then the missionaries saw that they had a second ox with them. They put it in the yoke alongside the first one. How different now! The yoke rested horizontally across their shoulders. Easily, working in harmony under their equal yoke, the pair of oxen hauled the heavy load up the rough hill.

It was an instructive sight. The missionaries thought of the text in Scripture which says: “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness?” (2 Corinthians 6:14). It is often quoted to guide young people in their choice of friends, especially when forming relationships that could lead to marriage. Young people under the gospel are warned, Do not get close even to starting such a relationship with people from the world. The warning is a wise one, and lovingly given, with only their best interests in view. For such a relationship will prove to be an unequal yoke. It will be like a donkey and an ox awkwardly bound together, trying to pull life's burdens along, never really matched together at all.

Sometimes the young people do not see the danger. As a relationship begins to form, everything seems to go so well. It all goes so smoothly. Yes, this is a relationship between a donkey and an ox. One goes to church and one is from the world. One has a background of gospel righteousness and light. The other has a worldly background of unrighteousness and darkness. One would think that there could never be agreement between them – no fellowship, no communion. Yet they seem to walk together without problems. Yes, they have fundamentally different approaches to life. But when they meet, when they talk, when they do things together, they do not feel unequally yoked. They get on so well. They begin to persuade themselves that they are a perfect fit for each other.

However, they are ignoring the sloping angle of the yoke. They do not see that the one from the world is pulling down the other. It does not usually work the other way around. The one who knows the truth rarely manages to lift up the one from the world. If there is a levelling, it is almost always in the wrong direction. To some degree, the donkey could pull the ox down to his level, but the ox could not lift the donkey to his. The power of the natural heart pulls the unequally-yoked couple ever downwards, away from God and into sin.

This process can go unnoticed for long enough, as the relationship blossoms, deepens and eventually takes on an irresistible force all of its own, from which it is very difficult to return. Arrangements begin to be made for marriage. Soon the two are bound together in that lifelong union from which there can be no lawful exit until death. And all seems well. The occasional rubbing of the unequal yoke, though uncomfortable and unsettling at the time, is ignored. And it goes on like that for a while, shorter or longer.

The Scripture meanwhile has not changed. All along it has been speaking with one voice: "Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers". But its voice has not been obeyed. It has not seemed relevant. Contrary to its warning, all has gone so well. Perhaps the church-goer has continued to go to church. And perhaps there has been no opposition from the other party. No harm seems to have come.

But then, like the donkey and the ox, the couple reach a more difficult part of life's journey. Perhaps sickness enters the family. Perhaps there are money problems. Perhaps there are different approaches to bringing up the children. Perhaps there is now opposition to going to church. Perhaps resistance arises to even the most basic keeping of the Sabbath. There are now many rocks in the way to stumble over, and the way ahead looks steep. Now the underlying differences come to the surface. The vast gulf between the Bible's approach and the world's approach to life's difficulties reveals itself.

The marriage yoke, which had seemed so easy, now becomes uncomfortable. No longer is any progress made on life's journey. Both parties are hurting. They are hurting each other. If they were of one mind, two would be better than one and they would help each other with the yoke that has become so much more difficult to handle. But instead, their inequality, like that of the donkey and the ox, just manifests itself more and more. Two will be worse than one, if they are in the yoke together and cannot agree together. Arguments develop. One pulls this way; the other pulls that way. Under the pressures of life, they are tearing each other apart.

If they were a donkey and an ox, you would just unhitch them from the yoke and bring in a more suitable animal. But they are not animals. They are

husband and wife. Once yoked together – however unequally – they have to labour on together, whatever happens. In marriage, apart from death there is, ordinarily, no second opportunity. They cannot do what was done with the donkey and the ox. They cannot exchange the unsuitable partner for a more suitable one. They are stuck. So things can go on getting worse and worse. The children get caught up in it all, and their natural hearts, without grace, are unlikely to side with the parent leaning towards religion.

Remember the donkey and the ox! Be careful with the relationships you form. Be watchful over your hearts, so that they are not drawn away. However attractive people may be in many ways, if they are unbelievers it will probably end in tears. You might end up like so many others, and deny the faith altogether, through yoking yourself completely to the world. No more discomfort from an unequal yoke! But it is the wrong yoke. To obtain that ease, you will have to give up on the Bible, on Christ, on faith, on your soul, on your background, on your baptism, on any hope you might have for eternity. Along with your ungodly partner, now equally yoked, you are only proceeding full speed to hell! On the other hand, if you try to hold on to your connection with true religion, it will increasingly introduce an imbalance into your marriage which will lead to great trouble.

“Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” The answer is clear. Although initial appearances may seem to promise the opposite, in the end the differences will assert themselves. If two people are not agreed on the most important things, they will not be able to walk together on the journey of life. Not smoothly, anyway. Therefore the warning must not be ignored: “Be not unequally yoked together”.

For Younger Readers

The Great God

The little boy was fast asleep in bed. He was four years old and was learning about God. And he thought about what he learned.

He knew that there is a great God, and that this great God made him. He was taught to pray to this great God. So he knew that he should pray about things that happened to himself.

As the boy slept, he probably had a frightening dream. He awoke out of his sleep crying loudly. His mother came to him and asked gently what was wrong. He told her that he was afraid. He wanted to know if God would really take care of him.

His mother told him that God could take care of him when it is dark as well as when it was light. The boy put his head back on the pillow. His mother heard him say, “How good it is that we have a God!” He soon fell asleep.

Yes, it is good to have this God as our God. He is able to do wonderful things. You should ask Him to be your friend, for Jesus’ sake. Ask Him to guide you all the way through life and to take care of you always.

Try to learn these words from Psalm 48:14: “This God is our God for ever and ever: He will be our guide even unto death”.

Peer Pressure and How to Resist It

The Book of Proverbs in the Bible has a lot of advice, particularly directed at young people? Written by the wise man, Solomon, it is full of instruction for all of us, but a lot of it is directed particularly at young folk – like you!

In the very first chapter he deals with the problem of peer pressure, and temptations to follow others into sin. What does he say? “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.” Is that not wise advice for each of you?

This was illustrated recently by a very sad event in our area. A young lad in high school, 16 years old, from a church-going family, attending a church school, a top-grade student with a nice circle of friends – he was enticed, or tempted, by some other boys from another school who were not his usual companions. “Come with us”, they said – come to a big party, a “rave”. He knew his parents would not approve of this, so he did not tell them the truth about where he was going. What happened?

At that party were some wicked men who tried to push drugs on these young people. This lad gave in to the temptation and the pressure – just this once, he probably thought. He tried one illegal drug, and his body took a very bad reaction to it. He collapsed and was rushed to hospital, unconscious. His parents received a visit from the police at 5 am to tell them this bad news. In spite of all the efforts of medical staff he went into organ failure and died two days later. It was unspeakably sad.

The Bible is so relevant for each of us today, just as much as it was all these years ago, when Solomon wrote. There are three short pieces of advice

for you in these verses from Proverbs 1. This is how to deal with peer pressure and other temptations to do what is wrong:

1. "*Consent thou not.*" Say, *No!* Do not even discuss it. Just say, *No!*
2. "*Walk not thou in the way with them*". Do not go with them; do not go near any situation that may be sinful!
3. "*Refrain thy foot from their path.*" Keep right away from their company and their ways. 1 Corinthians 15:33 tells us: "Evil communications corrupt good manners"; in other words, bad company will have a bad influence on you. That is true, however good your intentions may be. There is no doubt about it.

You should pray to the Lord to keep you. Pray too that you would have the same love to the Bible and to the standards of God's law as the Psalmist had who wrote,

"O how love I thy law! It is my study all the day:

It makes me wiser than my foes, for it doth with me stay."

Then, with the Lord's blessing and keeping, you would be able to continue with these further words from Psalm 119:

"My feet from each ill way I stayed, that I may keep Thy word,
I from Thy judgements have not swerved, for Thou hast taught me, Lord".
J van Kralingen

For Junior Readers

"It Is All Clear up Here"

How would someone cross the Atlantic in 1930? There were no passenger aircraft flying, for instance, between Britain and America then. The first flight of any aircraft across the Atlantic from east to west only took place in 1928. So at that time people had to go by sea, in a liner, if they wanted to get from Britain to America, or from America to Britain.

One such passenger liner was sailing across the Atlantic and ran into thick fog, and fog can be very, very dangerous. When fog is thick, you cannot see far away – only a very short distance.

The passengers on the ship expected that the captain would slow down at once. But he carried on at full speed. They became more and more worried, because *they* could only see a short distance away. What if their liner crashed into another ship? So some of the passengers decided that something had to be done. A group of them were sent up to speak to the captain, on the top deck of the ship; they were to ask him to slow the ship down.

But the captain told them: "Everything is all right. It is all clear up here."

There was no fog high up. The fog, thick though it was, was only down near the sea. The captain could see perfectly clearly all around him.

Often we may think that everything in the world is out of order. Countries go to war; governments meet all kinds of difficulties. Even in your own life, young though you are, many things may seem to work out in a strange way. Or things may work out as you expect.

But God sees everything, and He is in control of everything. How important then to be a friend of God! If you are God's friend, He is controlling everything for your good.

And how can you be God's friend? Remember you are a sinner, so you must come to Him through Jesus Christ. In other words, you must believe on Him, because He died instead of sinners, taking the punishment of their sins upon Himself.

If you do not believe on Jesus, you will continue to be God's enemy. But if you do believe in Jesus – and that is what He is calling on you to do – then God will take care of you always. Remember that He sees everything and understands it all – however little we may understand of what is happening around us. How good it is to trust in God, and to trust in Him always! The Bible tells us: "Blessed are all they that put their trust in" Jesus (Psalm 2:12). They put themselves into the care of a good God, who knows everything.

Through the Alphabet with the Bible

Here are five verses from the Bible using the word:

Open

And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall *open* and none shall shut; and he shall shut and none shall *open* (Isaiah 22:22).

Precept. I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: *open* thy mouth wide and I will fill it (Psalm 81:10).

Promise. Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear My voice, and *open* the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me (Revelation 3:20).

Prayer. *Open* Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law (Psalm 119:18).

Encouragement. When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will *open* rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water (Isaiah 41:17,18).

Youth Conference in New Zealand

The fifth Youth Conference in the Australian and New Zealand Presbytery took place on 7-9 January this year. This was the first to be held in New Zealand, at a centre in Rotorua. Six papers were delivered to the 25 young folk who attended. The degree to which those attending became involved was very heartening: many questions were asked and the discussions were lively. It was very evident that the subjects chosen were of real interest to young and old alike. It was also very encouraging to welcome some from outside our denomination and to hear from them also a real appreciation of the stand our Church takes on subjects such as Christmas and Easter.

This was the subject of a paper Mr Calvin MacKenzie delivered. And Mr Hank Optland presented a paper which expressed our adherence to and appreciation of the Authorised Version of the Scriptures. The paper delivered by Mr Dick Vermeulen, on "Social Friendships", raised real and genuine interest.

Two papers were on missions: one on New Zealand and one on China. They were given by Mr Cornell Van Kralingen and Rev G B Macdonald. And Rev Jett Smith gave a paper on Mary, Martha and Lazarus. These also gave rise to worthwhile discussions. It was encouraging also to see young folk from Scotland, England and Canada present.

The New Zealand Committee organised a tour to one of the favourite attractions in Rotorua, where we saw the boiling mud and the steaming hot water springs. The Committee's prayer is that there may be fruit following these conferences which would be to God's honour and to the welfare of the souls of all that were in attendance.

J van Praag

Looking Around Us

"Life Is Short"

It was a unique accident. A woman, on holiday in the West Highlands, was coming to a house late at night. A stag had found its way into the garden and panicked. As he rushed for the gate, one of his antlers pierced the woman's throat. She could not breathe properly and spent two weeks in intensive care.

She is now much better and commented, "Life is short and, at any moment, something can happen to us". That is how we should think too. But we should go further and think earnestly about what is beyond life – heaven and hell. We should seek the Lord with our whole heart. We should believe on the Saviour now, before something happens to us, to sweep us into eternity.

Floods and Drought

For several weeks from last December, Britain experienced a most unusual degree of wind and rain, but the effects have been most serious in southern England. Rainfall records stretch back to 1766, but the amount of rain this January, across that part of the country, was greater than in any other year since then. The result is that large areas of land were under water and 5800 properties were flooded. Some of those who were worst affected lashed out angrily at the Government, and it is probably true that more could have been done sooner to help the people involved.

But does anyone in the Government think of God? Does anyone think of Him among those who are experiencing hardship because of the unending rain? Does anyone remember that “the Lord sitteth upon the flood”, that He is in control of everything, that “the Lord sitteth King for ever” (Psalm 29:10)? And does anyone seek His help in prayer? Probably there are some who prayed that the rain would stop, so that the water would drain away from the land and from their houses. Perhaps there are some who recognise that the Lord has a controversy (see Micah 6:2) with the people of Britain because of their sins. They will plead with God that He would turn from His fierce anger and, not only give more comfortable weather conditions, but work powerfully in the hearts of multitudes, making them willing to turn from their sins and trust in Jesus Christ.

Flooding is not the only weather event that causes hardship. The opposite problem, drought, has often caused difficulties in various parts of the world. In 1907 drought was causing great concern in eastern Australia. No doubt godly people took their difficulties to God in prayer. But the Brushgrove-Grafton congregation (later to become part of the Free Presbyterian Church) held a special day of prayer. Perhaps the most surprising thing is that the church service, conducted by Rev Walter Scott, was reported at length in the local newspaper, the *Clarence and Richmond Examiner*. (The report was reprinted in *The Free Presbyterian Magazine* for April 1908.)

The *Examiner* reported that a large congregation was present. Mr Scott preached on part of Solomon’s prayer as recorded in 2 Chronicles 6:26,27: “When the heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because they have sinned against Thee; yet if they pray toward this place, and confess Thy name, and turn from their sin, when Thou dost afflict them; then hear Thou from heaven, and forgive the sin of Thy servants, and of Thy people Israel, when Thou hast taught them the good way, wherein they should walk; and send rain upon Thy land, which Thou hast given unto Thy people for an inheritance”. He also spoke about God’s answer to Solomon: “If I shut up heaven that

there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people; if My people, which are called by My name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land” (2 Chronicles 7:13,14).

The preacher asked why Solomon thought of such a calamity as the withholding of rain. It was because he knew how prone man is to depart from God. Mr Scott explained that they were holding the service that day because God, in His Providence, had withheld rain. He quoted from Psalm 107: God turns “a fruitful land into barrenness”, and it is “for the wickedness of them that dwell therein”. Such a providence, said Mr Scott, was to “teach us the good way wherein we should walk” – though “this is little regarded nowadays”. People concentrated on “secondary causes”. So today, and to an even greater extent, people focus on what takes place in God’s providence and forget the God of providence, who is ruling over everything. “Prayer to God”, Mr Scott told his congregation, “was their duty and privilege.”

He reminded them of Christ as “the one Mediator for them with God”, the One for whose sake they were to pray. He reminded them too that the text spoke about the people humbling themselves and turning from their wicked ways and quoted the verse: “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time” (1 Peter 5:6).

At the end of his sermon, the preacher appealed to the people to stay loyal to the Word of God; they were to take it as their infallible guide in the face of the unbelief and worldliness around them. He quoted the command: “Ye shall keep My Sabbaths, and reverence My sanctuary: I am the Lord”. He noted how much the Sabbath was broken and pointed to the various unscriptural practices in the churches. He stated that God had permitted the drought, and then quoted the promise which follows the command: “If ye walk in My statutes, and keep My commandments, and do them; then I will give you rain in due season” (Leviticus 26:2-4).

After the sermon, there was solemn prayer for rain. Then the congregation sang from Psalm 68, including the words: “O God, Thou to Thine heritage didst send a plenteous rain”.

Did God answer the prayers of that day? Yes, He did – that very evening. What a difference there might be, spiritually and in other ways – in Australia, Britain and elsewhere – if there was widespread, believing prayer to the God who still hears prayer!

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