

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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Number 7

“I Am Accepted”

John Kent was dying. He was soon to pass into the eternal world. He would then have to appear before God. It ought to be a solemn question for everyone in that position: Will God accept me? Can He accept me as someone who is perfectly righteous, as someone who has kept God's law perfectly? And, particularly because we do not know when we will die, we should be asking these questions *now*.

Can He accept me, we should ask, as someone who kept the Sabbath Day perfectly, not only in outward things, but also in my thoughts? Were my attitudes to the Sabbath perfectly holy? Did I always welcome it as a tremendous opportunity to get good for my soul? Did I use every possible minute to worship God and learn about Him?

And can He accept me as someone who also kept the Fifth Commandment perfectly? Did I always obey my parents as I should have done? Did I always obey them without delay? Did I always have a sincere love to them? Did I put my whole heart into the things they asked me to do? Did I always speak respectfully about them to other people?

Do you feel that these questions assume an impossible standard? Yes, perfection is impossible – for people like us who have a sinful heart. Yet it was not an impossible standard for Adam and Eve at the beginning, before they fell into sin. But after their first sin they could never again live perfect lives. Nor can we, because we have fallen hearts. Sin is natural to us.

Even God's children, though they have new hearts, cannot keep God's Commandments perfectly. Though God is subduing their sin, He does not do so all at once. He subdues their sin gradually, and He will not complete that work until they are leaving this world for heaven. The Bible tells us that “there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not” (Ecclesiastes 7:20); there is no one in this world who always does what is right, without ever sinning.

When Kent, a sinner like everyone else, came to die, what had he to say about himself? He said, “I am accepted, accepted”. And the whole way he lived his life until then suggested very strongly that he was right in what

he said; people could see that he was a godly man. And God will bring holy people to heaven when they die.

Yet, as no one on this side of death is perfectly holy, how could Kent claim that God had accepted him? The answer to that question is that he was looking to the Substitute that God has appointed – Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who “came into the world to save sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15). He came to save John Kent and a huge number of other sinners. God knows who they are, and they are described as “a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations” (Revelation 7:9). And when each of this great multitude approaches death, they have the right to say, like Kent, “I am accepted”. Not all of them may be so assured about it; but they all, for Christ’s sake, have a *right* to say so. Kent himself suffered much pain and was sorely tempted by Satan during his final illness, yet God strengthened him to tell the people around him: “I am accepted”.

Kent was very likely thinking of Paul’s words: “accepted in the Beloved” (Ephesians 1:6) – the Beloved is, of course, Jesus Christ. Paul loved Him with all his heart, and so did John Kent. They loved Him as the Substitute for sinners like them, the One who did all that was necessary for them to be accepted by God Himself. What they could not do, Jesus did in their place.

It is true that they could not keep God’s law perfectly; they could not love Him with all their hearts. Indeed, before they were converted, they could not truly love Him at all. But Jesus kept the Sabbath perfectly; He had a perfect attitude to the Sabbath. He also kept the Fifth Commandment; He honoured Mary and Joseph with perfect obedience and with a sincere love; He had a perfect attitude to them. He kept all God’s Commandments perfectly, as the Substitute for every sinner who believes in Him. And as the Substitute for sinners, Christ also endured the punishment which otherwise would have fallen on them. “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23), and so He had to suffer the cursed death of the cross in their place.

How can God accept us, sinners that we are? We must believe in Jesus Christ; we must trust in Him as the substitute for sinners – the One who bore their punishment when He suffered and died, and who kept all the commandments, perfectly.

There was another man, a well-educated minister, who denied many important teachings of the Bible but especially the fact that Christ is God. This was all the more serious as it was his duty to point his people to the Lord Jesus as the divine Saviour from sin. This man’s name was John Bradford. (There was another John Bradford who was a martyr at the time of the Reformation; he was burned to death because he held to the teachings of Scripture.) One day the unbelieving Bradford was writing out a sermon

on the text, “Ye must be born again”, when all his sins suddenly came before his mind. He knew that it was wrong for a man like him to be a minister. His text told him that *he* needed to be born again.

So he stopped work on his sermon – in fact he never finished it – and he cried out to God to bring him through the new birth. He realised that his preaching was putting people wrong rather than doing them good. He burned almost all his old sermons; he could never use them again; he had seen that to sin against God is a very serious matter indeed. He realised too that he needed a Saviour who could really deliver from sin. He soon saw clearly that Jesus really is God and, being born again, he trusted in this Saviour as One who can save from sin. Jesus is only able to save from sin because He not only is a real man, He also is truly God.

The next Sabbath, Bradford began to preach the truth revealed in God’s Word. And, in God’s amazing kindness, five people were convinced of their sins by Bradford’s first biblical sermon. Possibly it was a sermon on that vital truth from John 3: “Ye must be born again”.

When Bradford believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, God accepted him as if he had never sinned – as if he had always kept God’s commandments perfectly. He was accepted, not because of anything he had done to please God – in fact, he had never done anything to please God. He was accepted only because of what Christ did as his Substitute. To say that Bradford or Kent or anyone else was accepted by God is just to say that he was justified. *The Shorter Catechism* explains justification like this: “an act of God’s free grace, wherein He pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone” (Answer 33).

If we are to get to heaven, we must be justified; we must be accepted as righteous before God. So we must be willing not to look for a righteousness which we can produce ourselves but submit instead to the righteousness that Christ has provided through His work as a substitute for sinners. We must receive Christ’s righteousness by faith alone. We must believe in Him, just as Paul and Silas directed the jailer in Philippi: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31).

The jailer did believe in the Saviour; so he was justified, by faith alone. We do not know anything about his death, but we can be sure that, just as he was accepted by God when he believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, so God accepted him into heaven. And if we, like him, obey the call to believe in Jesus Christ alone for salvation, our death too will bring us into the eternal happiness of a better world – just as John Kent and John Bradford were brought into the blessedness of heaven. There is no other way of safety.

Regeneration and Conversion

2. Sinners Cannot Believe and Repent

Rev K M Watkins

This is the second part of a paper given at this year's Youth Conference. The first part spoke of a young man in Birmingham who had great zeal for seeing sinners saved, but little knowledge of what Biblical salvation is, as involving regeneration and conversion. The paper's original subtitle – "Make the tree good, and its fruit will be good" – explained these terms in reference to the soul. Regeneration is the Holy Spirit changing an evil tree into a good one. Conversion is the good fruit that comes immediately from that now-regenerated tree.

In the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 7, the Lord Jesus said, "Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit" (verse 17). He emphasised the impossibility of it being any other way: "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" (verse 16). Of course not. A spiky thorn bush does not yield soft delicious grapes, nor do piercing thistles provide sweet desirable figs. They do not do so because they *cannot* do so. As surely as "a good tree *cannot* bring forth evil fruit", so "neither *can* a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit" (verse 18).

The meaning is clear. A soul still in its fallen condition *cannot* bring forth the good fruits of grace. It *cannot* convert itself. It *cannot* believe in Christ. It *cannot* repent of sin. It can only produce the evil fruits of sin, according to its character. Before it can produce good fruits, its inward character must be changed. Only when it has been made good will it produce good fruit. It is regeneration, and only regeneration, that will make it good. Regeneration brings the soul from spiritual death to spiritual life. Then the soul will bring forth faith and repentance, in conversion.

The young man in Birmingham did not understand these things. He did not start from a right understanding of the full extent of man's fallen condition. Whilst he spoke of evil fruits brought forth by sinners, he did not emphasise the evil tree that produced them – the heart that is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. He spoke of the sins that sinners do. But he did not explain that those who sin are sinners by nature. He would tell sinners that they could make a decision for Christ, as if there was still some flicker of life remaining in them which they could fan into the flame of faith by using their own free will.

He should have taken in a journey to Ephesus as he travelled the Romans road (see the first article). The Ephesians were spiritually "*dead* in trespasses and sins" (2:1) before God quickened them into spiritual life. Just as corpses can do none of the things that the living can do, so the spiritually dead can

do none of the things that spiritually-alive souls can do. As soon expect the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the lame to walk, merely by using their own free will, as ask the unregenerate to believe and repent merely by using their own free will. The will of fallen man is as corrupt and depraved as all the rest of his soul, and is therefore incapable of choosing spiritual good and rejecting spiritual evil. Sinners have no power, ability or willingness to believe in Christ or repent of sin.

Does man have free will? Yes and no. Man is always free to choose what he wants to choose. In that sense he has free will. But man is made in such a way that he only chooses in accordance with his own character. In that sense his will is not free. It always chooses in accordance with his spiritual state. If he is not regenerated, the only things he ever desires are things that agree with his sinful nature. His carnal mind is enmity against God. It is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be. Left to himself, his wicked heart will never turn to Christ. That is why the Lord Jesus said, "No man [that is, no unregenerate man] *can* come to Me" (John 6:44). That is why He complained, "Ye *will* not [that is, you are not willing to] come to Me, that ye might have life" (John 5:40).

Put hay and meat before a dog and a horse. Without forcing either, the horse, refusing the meat, will eat the hay. The dog, refusing the hay, will eat the meat. Every time. That is their nature. Set Christ and sin before the unregenerate sinner. Leave him to his own free will. He will refuse Christ and choose sin. Every time. That is his nature.

The young man did not understand that. Do you? Are you thinking that deep down you want Christ and salvation, even though every time He is offered to you in the gospel, you refuse Him and go on in sin? Do you look on yourself as a kind of victim, powerless to do what you wish you could do? Friend, you are not a victim. You are responsible for destroying yourself. It is your own fault. You do not believe because you do not want to. You do not repent because you do not want to. You do not produce the good fruits of faith and repentance because you do not want to.

What the dog needs before it will choose hay instead of meat is a new character. Give it a horse-like character and now it will eat hay most heartily. That is what the unregenerate sinner needs. He needs a change of character. He needs his will to be renewed. He needs his cold, hard, dead heart of stone to be replaced with a warm, tender, living heart of flesh. He needs to be made a new creature in Christ. That is exactly what regeneration does!

When regeneration takes place, conversion automatically follows. The regenerated sinner now comes to Christ in faith, embracing Him in the gospel, and now turns from his sin in repentance. The young man was putting the

cart before the horse, telling people to believe so that they could be born again. In fact it is the other way round! People must be born again in order to believe. The eyes of the blind have to be transformed before they can see, likewise the ears of the deaf before they can hear and the legs of the lame before they can walk. The spiritually dead must be made spiritually alive, by a power from outside themselves, before they can do spiritual acts like believing and repenting. Make the tree good by regeneration, and then its fruit will be good in conversion. You have to be regenerated in order to believe and repent.

Who produces regeneration? The young man told sinners that they could produce it themselves, by deciding to believe. He thought it was something that sinners do for themselves – as if they, evil trees, had resources within to turn themselves into good trees. How wrong he was! He should have travelled back to the Old Testament, and listened to Job saying, “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one” (Job 14:4). And to Jeremiah saying, “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil” (Jeremiah 13:23). A thorn bush cannot transform itself into a vine, neither can a thistle turn itself into a fig tree. A sinner cannot transform himself into a believer. In regeneration the sinner does absolutely nothing. He contributes nothing at all. He is altogether passive. It is done to him, not by him. And it is done to him *by God*.

Therefore confess to the Lord your inability and unwillingness as sins. Blame yourself for refusing to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. Admit that you do not repent because you love your sins. And cry to the Lord to give you a new heart. Plead with Him to regenerate you. Ask Him to make you able and willing to believe and repent.

The Law Student and the Church Bell

One day in 1854 a young Spanish law student, whose name was Hernandez, was walking along a Gibraltar street. As he passed a church, the bell was ringing. Hernandez asked someone what it meant and was told that there was to be a Protestant service in the church. He was curious and went in to see what was happening; he had been told that if Protestants worshipped anything, they worshipped the devil. But what, he wanted to know, did their form of worship really look like?

When Hernandez went in, he was surprised to see that no ceremonies were being performed and no crucifix or any other idol was being worshipped. All

that was happening was a serious man speaking earnestly to the people in front of him. The law student took note of something else: there was a book open in front of the preacher. The sermon was in English and Hernandez did not know the language; so he could not understand anything that was being said. But, for some reason, he was very impressed by the book.

What book was it? he asked someone. It was a Bible, came the answer. Hernandez had heard about the Bible, but he had never seen one. And he did not give up searching till he obtained a copy for himself. He took it home, read it and received the truths God has revealed in His Word. He showed the Bible to his father and his family, with the result that the whole household was converted.

Later, to use his own words, he gave up the study of the law of Spain for the study of the law of heaven. He went to Gibraltar to prepare for the ministry, studying with the minister – his name was Sutherland – whose church he had visited there. So either Sutherland knew Spanish or else the Spaniard had learned English. Anyway, in 1869 the young man eventually became the minister of a Protestant church in Cadiz, in south-west Spain.

Later that year, J A Wylie, a Scottish minister, visited Cadiz and attended the church on a weekday evening. He found Hernandez preaching to an attentive congregation, mostly men. By this time, when Hernandez had been just three months in the congregation, there were 100 names on the communion roll; Hernandez had examined them all and believed that each of them had been savingly converted. In fact, 300 people had wanted to become members of the congregation, but the minister did not feel able to accept the others; he was wisely cautious in this matter.

The previous Sabbath three priests had been in the congregation and also a Countess, who was anxious to obtain a Bible. Hernandez was not able to help her at once but promised to have one for her the next Sabbath. One visitor on the evening when Wylie was present was the alcalde, the chief magistrate of the city. Wylie was rather surprised at this, as a William Tasker, a minister friend of his, had told him about his experience in Cadiz just 12 years before. On the day he arrived he gave away one or two copies of the Bible. That night he was fast asleep when, at midnight, an alcalde (not the same man) and some policemen came hammering on his bedroom door. They accused Tasker of breaking Spanish law by giving people a Bible and they demanded that he leave the city that very night.

Spain is a country where the Reformation movement began to take effect in the 1500s. But, sadly, it was completely wiped out by persecution, many people being burned to death because they believed the gospel. By the time that Hernandez became a minister in Cadiz, the Bible was available in Spain

and was having some effect. Clearly God was blessing His own Word, for sinners had been converted.

This reminds us that God is able to do wonderful things, and He is able to do so today – for ourselves and for vast numbers of other sinners throughout the world. For whatever reason, people from outside the congregation were interested enough to come along to the Cadiz church to hear the Word preached. Perhaps the priests' purpose was to find out how they could best oppose the Protestant church. But God is able to overrule such things; if people are hearing the Word of God preached, He may make them willing to believe in Christ. There is no limit to the power of the Holy Spirit to change hard hearts.

Samuel Rutherford and Prayer

5. More Teaching About Prayer

Matthew Vogan

Last month's article continued to explain what Rutherford had to say about prayer.

Persevering in prayer. Prayer must be persevering. "We are commanded to pray," says Rutherford, "continuing in prayer, for the prevalency [prevailing strength] of praying and victory is here (Matthew 26:41). He [Jesus] says not 'Pray', but 'Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation'." We are taught how to use what Bunyan, in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, calls the weapon of all-prayer: "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints" (Ephesians 6:18).

Rutherford explains this carefully: (a) we are to pray *always* (literally, in Greek: *in every season*). This speaks of watchfulness and fervour of praying – no occasion of prayer should be left out. (b) We are to pray always with *all prayer and supplication*. (c) We are to pray *in the spirit* – "in Greek it has something of . . . 'being prayed on by the Spirit', thereby showing that the Spirit of adoption is a victorious Spirit and overmasters the soul". (d) *Watching thereunto* – the spirit of prayer sleeps not much. (e) It goes on, not wearying, watching thereunto with *all perseverance, for all the saints*. 'Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and perfect that which is lacking in your faith'" (1 Thessalonians 3:10).

"If a good harvest richly recompenses a long summer's hope and a shipful of gold from India outweighs a long sea journey . . . the Lord, who is far more precious than a ship full of gold, must with the sweetness of His presence more than over-satisfy our troubles. Grapes green and unripe,

though trodden on, yield no good wine. Patience has but half a work, not its perfect work, when we are delivered but not humbled.”

Earnestness, or vehemence, in prayer. Vehemence and crying in prayer are both necessary and natural. Hunger and extreme necessity cannot afford to be modest or understated. “An arrow drawn with full strength hath a speedier flight; therefore the prayers of the saints are expressed by crying in Scripture. Christ prayed with strong crying or war-shouts and tears. The cry addeth wings to the prayer. It is effectual – ‘this poor man cried, and the Lord heard and saved him from all his fears’. Vehement prayer is importunate”. In James 5:16 it is fervent as well as effectual, and this word *fervent*, as Rutherford explains, literally points to “prayer possessed with fervour of spirit”.

Practical difficulties in the way of earnest prayer. Rutherford deals with practical difficulties that believers may face as they struggle in prayer. One soul may object: “My prayer cannot be heard – it cannot be effectual, my words seem to be almost incoherent [mixed up] and without sense”. Rutherford helps by pointing out that even broken prayers are heard; “every broken parcel of prayer is prayer”. The Syrophenician woman missed her words – she said, “Have mercy on me, my daughter is vexed” [Matthew 15:22]; she should have said, “*because* my daughter is vexed, but the mind is hasty, that she lets slip words”.

The “forlorn [prodigal] son forgot the half of his prayers; he resolved to say, ‘Make me as one of thy hired servants’; (Luke 15:19) but (verse 21) he prayeth no such thing”. Another person may lament, “I find I cannot speak at all”. This was the condition of the psalmist when he says, ‘I am so troubled, that I cannot speak’ (Psalm 77:4). Even groaning is spoken of as praying: ‘The Lord looketh down from heaven, to hear the groaning of the prisoner’ (Psalm 102:20). “Words are but the body, the garment, the outside of prayer; sighs are nearer the heart-work.” Hannah prayed in the heart, her lips moved but her voice was not heard. Some desires are above words and come out in nothing but sad sighs and deep groans.

Someone may say, “I cannot utter anything”. The Lord can hear the voice of your weeping (Psalm 6:8). “Tears have a tongue, and grammar, and language that our Father knoweth.” Mothers can understand hunger in their baby’s tears. A poor individual objects, “But I cannot even weep”. Hezekiah could only “chatter as a crane, and a swallow, and moan as a dove” (Isaiah 38:14). A more downcast individual complains: “I have nothing even of this”. Rutherford offers the consolation that even looking up is spoken of as prayer: “Mine eyes fail with looking upward” (Psalm 69:3). “In the morning will I direct my prayer unto Thee, and will look up” (Psalm 5:3). Prayer is a pouring forth of the soul, no matter what way it is expressed.

Fervent, vehement prayer is called "wrestling, as Jacob by prayer wrestled with God. Now, in wrestling, the whole man is employed and all his strength, all the bones, nerves, legs and arms of the soul are set to work in praying." Jacob had a princely power over the Angel and prevailed; "he wept and made supplication unto Him" (Hosea 12:4). Prayer is taking hold of God: "there is none that calleth upon Thy name and stirreth up himself to take hold of Thee" (Isaiah 64:7). Prayer is a heavenly violence to God; giving the Lord no rest, it strives.

The Lord says, "Concerning the work of My hands command ye Me" (Isaiah 45:11). Command God? Do you and I know anything of this kind of prayer? Are we content to go on with prayers that make no real requests or demands of God? And do we expect such prayers to be effectual? To expect a harvest without sowing or ploughing is impossible. "Call unto Me and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things which thou knowest not" (Jeremiah 33:3). William Carey, an early missionary to India, said that we must "expect great things from God and attempt great things for God". This verse teaches that we must: expect great things from God and appeal for great things to God.

Such prayer prevails; it is effectual. The importunate widow obtained her request and the master of a family will grant the request of his neighbour by reason of his continual knocking (Luke 18:1-8; 11:8). Will God not hear His elect who cry unto Him day and night (Luke 18:7)? Some are discouraged; they do not have the bodily strength or other means to serve Christ as they would. "But if thou canst pray, thou dost set the whole wheels of Omnipotency on work, for the building of the Lord's house." Do not despise earnest and vehement wrestling, and fervent, persevering and patient prayer.

"Prayer," says Rutherford, "can put a reeling and tottering on king and court; pope, prelate and Babylon: we are to pray the king of the bottomless pit, the man of sin, the graven images of apostate Rome, out of the world. . . . Every one who hath the spirit of adoption, though poor and rejected of men, by prayer hath powerful influence on all the nations of the earth, on all Europe, on the ends of the earth, on the hearts of the Jews, on Turks and Indians. Prayer can reach as far as omnipotency, accompanied by the wise decree of our Lord; and the poorest girl or maid that can pray doth lend a strong lift to heighten the footstool of Christ's royal throne."

Answers to prayer. This is perhaps the most difficult aspect of prayer to deal with. Why does prayer seem to be unanswered? How do we know when we are answered? Rutherford responds to the first question: "Non-answering has a merciful and beneficial aspect to it. To find you are not answered, and [to] be sad for it, hath much of Christ [that is, His grace and presence]. Christ

often heareth when He doth not answer, His not answering is an answer and speaks thus, Pray on, go on, and cry. For the Lord holdeth His door fast bolted, not to keep out, but that you may knock and knock. Patience to wait for the answer is itself an answer. Prayer is to God worship; to us often it is but a servant upon mere necessity sent on a business.” “Wait upon Him, as the night watch waiteth for the morning. He will not tarry. Go up to your watch-tower, and come not down; but by prayer, and faith, and hope, wait on”.

How shall we know that we are answered? Hannah knew, because of peace after prayer. Paul knew by receiving new supplies of grace to bear the affliction that he had sought, in prayer, to be removed. Liberty and boldness of faith are other indications.

“It Is All True”

John Mason was at one time a noted minister in New York. He was once asked to visit a lady who was dying. She and her husband were very seriously wrong in what they believed; they even denied openly that Christ is God. Yet they attended Mason’s church.

When he reached her bedside, Mason asked her if she felt she was a sinner and saw her need of a Saviour. She frankly told him that she did not. She told him too that she completely disbelieved the doctrine of a Mediator.

“Then,” said the minister, “I have no consolation for you, not one word of comfort.” He told her that there is not a single passage in the Bible that gave him authority to speak peace to anyone who rejected the Mediator provided for lost sinners; she must suffer the consequences of her unbelief.

He was on the point of leaving the room when someone said to him: “If you cannot speak consolation to her, you can pray for her”. He agreed and knelt down beside her bed. He prayed for the woman as a guilty sinner, just sinking into hell. Then he got up from his knees and left the house.

A day or two afterwards, he received a letter from the lady herself. She earnestly wanted him to come and see her without delay. He came at once and was amazed at how she welcomed him. When he entered the room, she held out her hand to him and said, “It is all true”. She acknowledged that everything he told her on his last visit was true. “I have seen myself the wretched sinner which you described me to be in prayer”, she confessed. “I have seen Christ that all-sufficient Saviour you said He was. And God has mercifully snatched me from the abyss of infidelity in which I was sunk, and placed me on the Rock of Ages.”

God found her in the gulf of unbelief, rejecting the teachings of Scripture,

and gave her grace to rest her soul on Christ Jesus, the sure foundation for sinners to trust on. And she added, "There I am secure; there I shall remain. I know in whom I have believed."

All this seemed like a dream to Mason. But the woman's salvation became a clear reality to him as she went on to show that she had obtained a real knowledge of the way of salvation as revealed in the gospel. She showed too that she was relying as firmly on the gospel as if she had been a disciple of Christ for many years. Yet there was nothing like boasting or a false faith; she was humble, trustful and submissive to God. She told her husband to bring up their daughter in the fear of God and, above all, to keep from her those novels and other books which opposed the teachings of the Bible – books which, she confessed, had nearly brought her to ruin. And on the evening of that day, she died full of joy and peace in believing.

This shows the power of God to snatch sinners from the devil's grasp, even at the last moment. It was sinful of the woman to go on rejecting God's claims – to obey Him and believe all that He has revealed in the Bible. But God is very gracious. Yet we must not presume that we can go on through life rejecting God's call to repent and believe the gospel. We ought to submit to that call at once. Always remember that although one of the thieves crucified with the Saviour was saved almost at the last moment of his life, the other was left to perish. Christ is saying to all of us: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 16:31), and we ought to do so at once.

For Junior Readers

It Was Free!

Perhaps you have not heard of Patrick Robertson before. He was born in Perth, in Scotland, in 1777. His father was an elder in the church, and Patrick had the great blessing of being brought up in a godly home. His parents' prayers for him were answered when he was converted while he was still young. Then the Lord called him to the work of the ministry.

He became the minister in a small place near Aberdeen, called Craigdam. Most of his hearers were small farmers. In order to drive home his message, Robertson often used illustrations from country life, with which they were all so familiar.

At one time, potatoes were scarce and expensive. He used this illustration to show the freeness of the gospel offer of Christ: "Suppose there was a man standing at the street corner offering a bag of potatoes to everyone who would take them". "Would there not be a crowd," the minister asked, "and

all pushing through to get the gift? And suppose you should ask one of those who got the potatoes why he got them, he could only reply, 'I got them by the man's free grace'. As potatoes were the local people's ordinary food in those days, how foolish they would have been to refuse the kind man's offer!

What well-known verse of Scripture does this story remind you of? Perhaps you have even learned it: "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk, *without money and without price*" (Isaiah 55:1) – in other words *it was free*! What a beautiful gospel invitation! Everyone is invited. No payment is needed. We are welcome to receive the blessings offered. And if we do so, we will for ever remember it was by free grace.

The people of Craigdam would have been foolish not to accept the potatoes which were freely offered to them. How much more foolish are you if you do not come to Christ, who said, "*If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink*". It is the future of your never-dying soul which is at stake. "Hear, and your soul shall live" – live for ever!

J van Kralingen

For Younger Readers

A Good Prayer

Long ago, some young boys had to climb dirty chimneys. They had to brush away the soot from the chimneys. It could not have been nice work. Older men were too big to get up these chimneys.

A man spoke to one of these chimney sweeps, who was just 10. The man was afraid that the sweeps did not take time to pray. He asked the boy: "Do you, my young friend, ever pray?" "O yes, Mister."

"And when do you do it? You go out very early, don't you?"

"Yes, Mister, and we are only half awake when we leave the house. I think about God, but I cannot say that I pray then."

"When then?"

"You see, Mister, my master orders sweeps to climb the chimney quickly, but he allows us to rest a little when we are at the top. Then I sit on the chimney top and pray."

"And what do you say?"

"Ah, Mister, very little. I know no grand words with which to speak to God. Most often I only repeat a verse that I have learned at school."

"What is that?"

The boy answered earnestly: "God be merciful to me a sinner".

It is a good prayer for you too. You will find it in Luke 18:13.

The Conversion of Zaccheus

W S Plumer

Taken, with editing, from *Short Sermons for the People*. The text for this sermon was: "And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. And, behold, there was a man named Zaccheus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich. And he sought to see Jesus who He was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature. . . ." (Luke 19:1-10).

The word *Zaccheus* means pure, just, clean. If this man ever deserved so good a name, it was not till grace changed his heart. Before that he was anything but pure. Many a man has a name to which he is a disgrace. Zaccheus was a head man among the publicans, or tax-gatherers. The lowest order of publicans were no better thought of than thieves and pickpockets. An ancient Roman writer says that some of these tax-gatherers were honourable men. But in Judea, where many thought it was not right to pay taxes to a foreign power, the Jewish publicans who collected the tribute were always hated. A Jew who collected tribute for the Romans was looked on as a heathen. Some say they were not allowed to enter the temple, or even a synagogue. Such was Zaccheus, a man despised for his calling.

But this man still had curiosity. "He sought to see Jesus, who He was." That is, he wished to see what Jesus looked like. But he could not for the crowd. He was a small man. The crowd would not give way to him. So he "ran before and climbed up into a sycamore tree". It is sometimes very inconvenient to be small, and sometimes it is very inconvenient to be large. God settles these matters. What we have to do is submit to Him.

The sycamore tree of the Bible is a kind of fig-tree; some think it is more like a mulberry. Like our apple tree, it puts out branches a little above the ground. Into such a tree Zaccheus climbed. And when Jesus came to the spot, "He looked up and saw him". His eye had been upon him for good all along. He said to him, "Zaccheus!" The good Shepherd calls His own sheep by name, and they hear His voice. Christ said, "Make haste and come down: for today I must abide at thy house". It must have surprised Zaccheus very much that so great a person as Christ noticed him. And "he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully". That is the way to receive Christ. To do otherwise is to reject Him.

Such an event caused great talk. Among the people were those who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others, and all of them despised the publicans. So they found fault and "murmured, saying that He was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner". But Zaccheus felt very differently. His heart was touched with Christ's kindness.

A great change had come over him. And when he reached his house, he said to Jesus, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor". He did not say, I have always been giving to the poor. But he said, I do it now. He was a new man, and now began to lead a new life. But why did he not give all, instead of merely giving half? The answer is: he had no right to give it. It was not his to give. It belonged to other people whom he had wronged and robbed by false accusation. So he kept that to restore it to others from whom he had wickedly taken it. He not only gave back what he had taken, but, according to the law of Moses, he gave back four times as much.

The Lord Jesus knew his heart, saw he was sincere and was bringing forth good fruits. He said, "This day is salvation come to this house". Up to that time, that family had lived sinfully. But now there was a change for the better. Zaccheus was a Jew, and the change in him made him a true son of Abraham. And Christ justifies Himself in what He did for Zaccheus, by saying, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which is lost". Almost everybody agreed that Zaccheus was lost. He himself saw that he had been lost. It is the lost sheep that needs to be sought and found. It is the lost child for which people go through the streets ringing the bell.

Lessons. 1. It is well to be in the way of getting good and of meeting Christ in public and private worship. It is a pity that everybody does not go to the house of God. A woman said she would not go; she was afraid it would make her worse. But did it not make her worse to stay at home, at ease in her sins? Often during His life, and often since He ascended to heaven, Christ has said, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear".

Zaccheus, led by curiosity, went where Jesus was to pass, and he was saved! Whitefield tells us of a very bad man, who went to church "to pick a hole in the preacher's coat, and the Holy Ghost picked a hole in his conscience". Persuade people everywhere to come and hear the gospel.

2. True earnestness, whether natural or gracious, is not easily discouraged. Zaccheus was the head of a family, but he was intent on seeing Christ, so he did something boyish; he climbed a tree. Many sufferers had to pass through great obstacles to reach Christ's help. If people would be saved they must be in good earnest; they must be in dead earnest. He who is turned aside from his purpose by trifles, or even by great hindrances, will never be saved.

3. When we know our duty, it is wicked to hesitate. Christ said to Zaccheus, "Make haste, and come down And he made haste and came down." That is the way David was converted: "I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto Thy testimonies. I made haste, and delayed not to keep Thy commandments" (Psalm 119:59,60). Do not linger.

4. It is a great thing to know our time. Zaccheus knew his. Probably he

had never seen Christ before. So far as we know, Christ was never in Jericho again. We must "take time by the forelock". An old emblem for time was a human head with one long lock of hair in front, but all the rest was bald. This taught that, when you met an opportunity, you must grasp it and hold it tight; when it was past, there was no "hindlock" to seize. O that people knew their time. "Hell is the truth seen too late."

5. We must yield ourselves to God without reserve and without condition. Zaccheus did not say to Jesus, If Thou wilt do such and such, I will give my goods to the poor. No! We must give up all hopes, all plans, all thoughts which are opposed to Christ, and fall into His hands. An old writer tells of a prisoner of war who was to be sold as a slave in Rome. Someone asked him, Will you be faithful if I buy you?" His noble answer was, "I will be faithful whether you buy me or not". So we must give all to Christ, as our Lord and Master, come what will.

6. Regeneration makes a great change in anyone. In some this change appears greater than in others. But in all cases it is marked and definite. This very much applies to serious sins. Zaccheus' special sin was the love of money. As soon as he was converted he gave it up. If our piety does not subdue our worst sins, it is not genuine.

7. Poor wretched sinners may be saved. Zaccheus was a lost man, but Jesus saved him. Zaccheus lived in a city which God had long before delivered up to destruction; he was thought to be one of the worst men in it and yet he obtained mercy. Christ's mission into this world was to seek and to save that which was lost.

8. It makes a great change in a house when salvation comes in. Even for one of the children to believe in Jesus is a blessed thing. But when the head of a family turns to the Lord, then salvation comes in, as it were, at the front door. It is a fearful thing for a man to stand at the very entrance of his home and shut out the Lord Jesus and all the blessings of eternal life from his children. If a man will go to hell, he had better go alone than drag others with him. If a man will not go to heaven, let him not hinder others. There is no happier sight on earth than a whole house embracing Jesus Christ together.

9. The real cause of the change in Zaccheus was the grace of God; but the thought which seems to have overcome him was the kindness of Christ in noticing a man so commonly hated. Love conquers, when terror merely hardens. If we are ever led to repentance, it must be by the goodness of God. His right over us is complete, but our vile hearts resist everything till He gains the victory of love. The love shown in the cross of Christ is even greater than that shown in His visit to Zaccheus. He must be a bad man, with a wicked heart, who does not love the Lord Jesus Christ.

Scripture and Catechism Exercises 2013-14

Overseas Names for Exercise 2

Senior Section: *Chesley:* Esther Schuit. *Connecticut:* Rachel, Rebecca and Sarah Mack. *Gisborne:* Annika and Emma van Dorp. *Grafton:* Duncan Marshall. *Thembiso:* Clotildar Khabo, Sandulelo Khumalo, Buhlebethu Mhodi, Rebecca K Mkwanzani, Khumbulile Ndlovu, Zibisiso Sibanda, Matron Tshuma. *Zenka:* Moyo Velani.

Intermediate Section: *Auckland:* Claudia Campbell, Rita de Bruin. *Chesley:* Josiah Smith. *Singapore:* Nehemiah Chai Yong. *Thembiso:* Priveledge Bhebhe, Ruth and Shanaz Masango, Langelihle and Sanelisiwe Masuku, Sithabile Mphoko, Siphathisiwe Mpofu, Khuleka and Ivyne Ndlovu. *Zenka:* Sitsengisiwe Dube.

Junior Section: *Auckland:* James Campbell. *Chesley:* Joshua Schuit, Abigail Smith. *Grafton:* Christina Kidd, Calum Marshall, Rachel van Dorp. *Thembiso:* Bongwiwe, Evelyn, Nonhlanhla and Sijabulisiwe Ndlovu, Buhlebenkosi and Nokuthaba Sibanda. *Zenka:* Pedina Mathenjwa.

Upper Primary Section: *Auckland:* Rachel Campbell, Abby de Bruin. *Gisborne:* Sarah van Dorp. *Grafton:* Jared McAlpine, Hugh Marshall. *Singapore:* Owen Heyer Chai Yi. *Thembiso:* Talence Bhebhe, Abigirl, Lizwilenkosi, Thando, Nokukhanya and Sizalobuhle Gumpo, Zanele and Zibusiso Masuku, Beauty Mlotswa, Sibhekisiwe, Sidumisile, Thobile and Sehliselo Mpofu, Simosenkosi and Talent Ndlovu, Dean A Shoko, Gracious Sibanda, Thabisile and Thamsanqa Sibindi. *Zenka:* Prudence Nlotswa, Emmaculate Dube.

Lower Primary Section: *Auckland:* John and Peter Campbell, Megan de Bruin, Amelia Smith. *Chesley:* Kara Zekveld. *Connecticut:* Nathanael Mack. *Grafton:* William Marshall. *Singapore:* Naomi Ruth Chai Shi. *Thembiso:* Beauty, Buhlebenkosi, Melisa and Pheliso Gumpo, Innocent and Prosperus Masango, Naomi Masuku, Nompikhelelo Moyo, Nobukhosi, Tholakele and Xwayiso Ncube, Thembelihle Ngwenya, Nokukhanya and Silethubuhle Sibanda, Angela Tshuma, Silokuthaba Zikhali.

Looking Around Us

A Serious Book with a Serious Message

The Bible Society has been planning a campaign in London called, “Pass It on”. They want to encourage parents to read Bible stories to their children – an excellent idea. But their plan involves using a 50-foot inflatable whale to act out the story of Jonah and the fish.

The Bible Society’s group chief executive stated, “We’re not here to tell children what to believe. We simply want to give them a really fun experience they will always remember.”

Children find many parts of the Bible difficult to understand; so it is sensible for their parents to use Bible stories when they first begin to teach them about true religion. And we can expect the children to find the story of Jonah and the fish an easy one to follow.

Though children find such stories interesting to listen to, the Bible is a serious book with a serious message. Yet the stories and teachings of the Bible should not be taught in a boring way; they should always be made as interesting as is possible.

But acting out a Bible story is not the right way to go about it. Whenever actors put themselves in the place of another character, there is always something that is not genuine about what they are doing. The actors just cannot have someone else's feelings; they are only pretending to have these feelings. And it is completely wrong for anyone to try to play the part of Jesus; it is absolutely impossible to enter properly into His perfectly-holy feelings in any situation.

In the Bible God speaks to children as well as to grown-ups. Because it is a serious book, we are to treat it seriously. People of all ages, children included, are to believe what the Bible says. No one, of any age, has the right to argue with the Bible; that is to argue with God. If we argue with Him, it is certain that we are wrong and that God is right. He knows everything, and everything that He has revealed in the Bible is perfectly true. That is always the attitude we should have to God's holy Book.

In His kindness He has told us many things in the Bible. He has told us about Jonah, and we are to believe that what we read in the Book of Jonah really happened. It has useful lessons to teach us. He was a man who did what was foolish and sinful, but God taught him again and again and brought him back to where he ought to have been.

God has told us that we are sinners. Children, like everyone else, are to believe that they have sinned and that sin is a serious matter. He has said that sin must be punished, and if we are to find out how to escape the punishment we deserve, it is to the Bible we must go to find that out. But God has told us that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners; children, no less than others, are to believe that this is so. He died for sinners; He took the place of others and took their punishment. So everyone who believes in Jesus Christ goes free from that punishment, because He bore their punishment instead of them. These are all facts, and everyone is to receive them as truth. And everyone has a duty to go further: to trust in Jesus Christ to save them from the punishment that they deserve.

Bible stories are an important starting point for little ones. But it is wrong to make them just a "fun experience", without any concern that the teachings of the Bible are to be believed. Yet, whatever other people may do, let us take the Bible seriously – all of it. Let us read it carefully. Let us ask God to bless it to us. And let us take very seriously the call that God makes in His Word to everyone: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31).

Price £1.00