

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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Cover Picture: The Free Presbyterian church in Kinlochbervie, Sutherland.

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No 12

No God – a Foolish Thought

God is. It is the most important statement that anyone can make. And it is absolutely true. The idea that the whole universe, and everything in it, came into existence just by chance – without any being to exert the least degree of control over the process – is absurd. If people had not got so used to the theory of evolution, no one would believe it. People would realise that it is completely impossible for a process of evolution to have brought about a world which is so complicated, and creatures, great and small, which are so complicated – especially human beings with their capacity to think, to convey their thoughts to others, and to worship.

This idea of evolution would never have become so popular apart from one other matter: many people do not want to accept the only alternative, which is to believe in a divine Creator. If we accept that God has created us, then we must accept the obligation to obey Him. And there are too many people who do not wish to submit to the authority of God; they do not want Him to tell them what to do. They do not want to keep His commandments, and they do not want to feel guilty when they disobey.

This may remind us of what David wrote: “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God” (Psalm 14:1). David probably did not hear such people say out loud: There is no God. But they said it in their hearts; in other words, it was their desire. They wanted God *not* to exist. It was an extremely foolish thought, and very sinful. Today people are much more ready to utter the words, There is no God. But the thought behind them comes from a heart which “is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jeremiah 17:9). We ought not to trust thoughts that come from deceitful hearts.

Let us be clear: the fool's thought is not true. God most certainly exists. The writer of Psalm 92 exclaimed: “O Lord, how great are Thy works!” He looked around him and saw the wonders of creation: the hills and the rivers, the trees and the crops growing in the fields. He knew that it was God who had made all these things, and he could not help praising God for it all.

Perhaps he looked around him again and saw a man coming to meet him. A few years before, the man was ungodly; everyone knew him as a great

sinner who never worshipped God. Now he was different. He worshipped God and tried to please Him; he was kind to other people and wanted to help them. What caused the change? It was the work of God. The Holy Spirit gave him a new heart and so the man trusted in God for salvation. The Psalmist recognised that, and perhaps he again exclaimed: "O Lord, how great are Thy works!"

When we look around us, we should recognise the work of God in creating the world and everything in it. But when we see a spiritual change in a man or a woman or a young person, we should recognise that this also is the work of God. It is a change that the person himself or herself could not bring about. Sin is too strong for us to get rid of; we cannot change our deceitful hearts; the devil has too powerful a grip for us to shake him off. Only God can subdue sin in our heart and make us able to trust in Christ for salvation; only God can change our hearts so that we sincerely receive the testimony of His Word about Himself and His demands; only God can release us from the grasp of the devil. So when we see someone converted, it is evidence that God exists. Apart from Him, such a change could never happen. And every such change is a reason to praise God.

After the Psalmist has lifted up his heart to God to praise Him for His works, he comments: "Neither doth a fool understand this". A fool cannot understand the works of God, especially His spiritual works. He needs God to teach him. He needs God to make him wise.

Have you learned that you need to be made wise, so that you can understand the works of God and come to a deep, trusting conviction that He does indeed exist? Or perhaps you want to argue that you are not a fool, because you never say that there is no God.

Suppose you want to do something that you know is wrong. You tell yourself that no one is going to see you. But what about God? Surely He can see you.

So you are acting as if He did not exist. When you tell yourself that no one can see you, you are really saying, There is no God. And that is very foolish, because God sees everything and He does so always. How much you need to ask God to teach you, to make you wise, to give you a new heart – a heart that would want to love Him and do everything that He tells you in the Bible.

No one knows when God carried out His wonderful work of conversion in Joseph's heart, but it must have been when he was quite young. Certainly he was just 17 when his brothers sold him to merchants who were on their way to Egypt. Some time afterwards, when he was working as a slave in Potiphar's house, his master's wife tempted Joseph to commit a serious sin

against the Seventh Commandment. Joseph refused, and one great reason for refusing was that he knew that he was always in God's presence, that God saw him and everything he did.

So he asked the woman who persisted in tempting him: "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9). Here was a wise young man, and it was God who had made him wise. Apart from God, and His wonderful work, Joseph would have continued to be foolish, like everyone else. Maybe he would have refused to commit particular sins, but he would never have had the sense of sin he displayed in Potiphar's house: that it is something evil done "against God".

We are all on our way to eternity, where it will be absolutely obvious that God exists. No one in heaven will want to deny it, and no one in hell will be able to deny it. But we already have more than enough evidence for the fact that God is. If we are rejecting it, the basic reason is that we do not want to submit to Him.

We need a new heart. We need God to work in us by the Holy Spirit so that we will willingly receive this truth – that God is – and every other truth revealed in the Bible, especially that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Let us pray earnestly, for Christ's sake, that God would take away our foolish ways of thinking and make us willing to believe in Him.

What the Bible Teaches About Sin

1. All Are Sinners

Charles Hodge

This is the first in a series of shortened sections of the book, *The Way of Life*. The book was written to set out some of the basic teachings of the Bible. Hodge was a respected American teacher of students for the ministry till he died in 1878.

The Scriptures are, without any doubt, the Word of God. We should be specially concerned to learn what they teach about human character, the way of salvation, and how we should live. On the first of these points, the Bible very clearly teaches that all are sinners. Paul proves this truth at length, both for those who do not have the light of God's revelation, and those who have.

The first group, Paul says (in Romans 1), can justly be charged with ungodliness and immorality. This is so because God's perfections – His eternal power and godhead – have always been displayed by the things which have been created. Yet these people have not acknowledged their Creator. They neither worshipped Him as God, nor were thankful for His mercies, but

served created things more than the Creator. In thus departing from the fountain of all excellence, they departed from excellence itself. Their foolish hearts were darkened, and their corruption shows itself, not only by their idolatry, but also by various forms of moral evil, both in heart and life. These sins are committed against the law, which is written on everyone's heart; so they know that those who do such things are worthy of death. They are therefore without excuse even in their own minds.

But people who have the Bible are blessed with a revelation of God's character and demands. For them the situation is even plainer when they do not give God the inward and the outward worship which is due to Him. They neglect to serve Him and really prefer His creatures to Himself. They constantly dishonour God by breaking His law, the perfect rule of duty to be found in the Scriptures.

Thus Paul shows that all classes of mankind are guilty before God. This universal guilt is confirmed by the clear testimony of other Scriptures which Paul quotes: "There is none righteous, no, not one. There is none that understandeth; there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way; they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no not one" (Romans 3:10-12).

The Holy Spirit does not use this language to describe the people of any one age or country, but the whole human race. So we find similar statements in every part of the Bible, in the New Testament as well as in the Old. And there are no passages of an opposite kind. It is expressly said: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). "There is no man that sinneth not" (1 Kings 8:46). "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

When we read in the Bible of speaking or acting *after the manner of men*, it means to speak or act wickedly. The world are the wicked. *This present evil world* is a description of mankind. The Saviour told those who refused to be His disciples: "The world cannot hate you; but Me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil" (John 7:7). "They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them" (1 John 4:5).

Human sin is one of those basic facts which are taken for granted on almost every page of the Bible. The whole scheme of redemption supposes that man is a fallen being. Christ came to seek and to save the *lost*. He was announced as the Saviour of *sinners*. His coming and His work have no meaning or value unless we are guilty, for He came to save His people from their sins; to die the just for the unjust. Those who have no sin do not need a Saviour; those who do not deserve death do not need a Redeemer.

This teaching is also assumed in all the Bible says about what is necessary

if we are to enter heaven. All men, everywhere, are commanded to repent. But repentance assumes sin. Everyone must be born again in order to see the kingdom of God; they must become new creatures; they must be renewed after the image of God. Being dead in trespasses and in sins, they must be made spiritually alive. The Bible always teaches that everyone needs to be both pardoned and made holy if they are to be admitted to heaven. So it teaches that everyone is a sinner.

The Scriptures also teach that the sinfulness of men is deep-seated; it consists in corruption of the heart. God says of the human heart that it is “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jeremiah 17:9). David says, “Behold I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psalm 51:5).

Because our nature is corrupt, the Bible always refers everything good in man to the Holy Spirit, and everything evil to his own nature. And the terms *flesh* and *spirit* are constantly opposed to each other; the first refers to our nature apart from God’s influence, and the second to the Holy Spirit or His effects. To be *in the flesh*, to *walk after the flesh*, to *mind the things of the flesh*, are all Scripture expressions which describe our natural state. So Paul says, “In my flesh dwelleth no good thing” (Romans 7:18), and Jesus said, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh” (John 3:6).

This humbling doctrine is involved in all the Bible’s descriptions of the change which is necessary for salvation. It is no mere outward reformation; it is being born of the Spirit, a new creation. The Bible is full of the teaching that we are depraved, fallen beings who have lost the image of God and must be created anew in Christ Jesus before we can see the kingdom of heaven.

Experience confirms these teachings. People may differ in the extent of their sinfulness, but they cannot ignore the fact that they are sinners. As far back as they can go in their lives, they find the testimony of conscience against them. Every human being is a witness to the fact that our moral nature is such that we prefer to seek our happiness in created things, instead of seeking it in God and in holiness.

When we say that someone is a bad man, we mean that the main bent of his actions proves him to have bad principles. And when we say that man’s nature is depraved, we mean that his moral acts are wrong. “A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. . . . Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them” (Matthew 7:18). The Saviour used this illustration to teach that the usual character of a man’s acts is a sure index of the state of his heart; so when we find sin in all men, it is sure evidence that their nature is corrupt. Indeed, when we observe ourselves and others, the most obvious thing about human nature is that it is depraved.

“The Power of God unto Salvation”

4. Paul's Second Missionary Journey (2)

Last month's article followed Paul on his second missionary journey, when he had Silas as his companion; the article ended with the conversion of Lydia in Philippi. This month's article is based on Acts 16:16-17:9. You will find the places mentioned here on the map printed on page 214 of last month's Magazine.

Some time after Lydia's conversion, Paul and Silas met a young woman as they “went to prayer”, perhaps to a gathering of those who had been influenced by their preaching. This young woman was possessed by a devil, a spirit of divination. She was engaged in activities such as fortune-telling – activities which are strictly forbidden by the Word of God but earned a lot of money for the men who were controlling her. She followed the missionaries for many days, crying, “These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation”. Paul was disturbed by this and, in the name of Jesus Christ, commanded the spirit to come out of the woman. The spirit could not resist the supreme power of the Son of God and came out at once.

Of course, what the woman was saying was true. But Paul would have been upset at having to listen to the truth spoken by someone under the control of the devil. And he would have been sorry for the woman; he showed her great kindness. But the men who had been controlling her were annoyed that they had lost a valuable source of income. They caught Paul and Silas and accused them before the magistrates as those who “exceedingly trouble our city”, claiming that they were teaching customs unlawful for Romans to observe (remember Philippi was a Roman colony). The multitude, of Roman citizens, were enraged; they tore off the missionaries' clothes and called on the magistrates to beat them with rods. Without a trial, or any investigation, Paul and Silas were repeatedly beaten; then they were thrown into prison, where their feet were secured in the stocks. This was a wooden block, intended not only to prevent the prisoner escaping but was also an instrument of punishment, for the prisoner's legs were stretched out uncomfortably.

Here we have a further illustration of Satan's opposition to the gospel, but this time he overreached himself, as he often does. The jailer was to be saved; he was to be rescued from Satan's kingdom. At midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing praises to God. We are told that the other prisoners heard them; probably the jailer had heard them too. But suddenly there was a great earthquake which opened all the prison doors. This meant that the prisoners could escape. The jailer was wakened and, assuming that the prisoners had fled, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself. In his

pagan culture people thought it was more honourable for a man to commit suicide than to be accused of failing in his duty. But Paul had a Christian understanding of the value of human life and shouted to him: “Do thyself no harm; for we are all here”.

Soon the jailer was asking Paul and Silas: “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Their answer may be given to everyone who is concerned for his or her soul: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved”. And they spoke of salvation for his household as well as for himself. They went on to give further teaching to him and his household. Soon afterwards the jailer was baptized, as were all who belonged to him. But, before that, he showed that he now had a new attitude to God’s servants by washing the wounds caused by the beating they had endured. After the baptism, he gave Paul and Silas a meal. Only then is it confirmed that he and his household believed in God. Not surprisingly, they were rejoicing.

The next day the magistrates sent a message to the jailer to let Paul and Silas go. But Paul pointed out that they had been beaten and imprisoned without having been tried by a court. What was more, as Roman citizens, they had special privileges; they should neither have been beaten nor imprisoned. He wanted the magistrates to come themselves to let them go. Paul wanted permission to be given publicly rather than privately; perhaps this would put the new Christians in Philippi in a stronger position if Satan’s followers tried to persecute them. The magistrates were afraid when they heard that Paul and Silas had Roman citizenship; so they did what Paul asked.

The missionaries would have left Philippi along one of the most famous of the Roman military roads, which stretched as far as Rome. They travelled only to Thessalonica (now known as Salonika) about 100 miles away. For three Sabbaths, Paul expounded the Old Testament Scriptures in the local synagogue. He was using them to demonstrate that the Messiah would have to suffer and then to rise from the dead. His aim was to prove that *Jesus* was the Messiah. Among those who believed were many Gentiles who till then had been worshipping in the synagogues; also mentioned specifically are “not a few” women who were of some importance in Thessalonian society.

But the Jews who rejected Paul’s testimony were jealous of the number of people who began to follow the missionaries. They stirred up wicked men who had nothing better to do and organised a riot. They attacked the house of a man named Jason, with whom Paul and Silas were staying, but they did not find the missionaries. Instead they called Jason and some of the other believers before the rulers of the city. These rulers were known as *politarchs*, and it is recognised as a mark of Luke’s historical accuracy that he uses exactly the right term for rulers in every district that he writes about. The

accusation made against Paul and Silas, when their followers were brought before these politarchs, has been made again and again against those whose preaching has resulted in many conversions; they were described as "those who have turned the world upside down". How good it would be if society everywhere was, in this sense, turned upside down by the preaching of the gospel today!

The next complaint was that the Apostles were undermining the government of Caesar, the Roman Emperor, because they were "saying that there is another King, one Jesus". It was true, of course, that they were proclaiming Jesus as a King; but by doing so they were strengthening, not undermining, the authority of the Roman Emperor, provided he did not interfere with Christian worship and practice. Jesus' kingdom, as He said Himself, "is not of this world"; it takes to do, first of all, with spiritual things.

"What Shall Be Done?"

Joseph Bottomley was a clever boy but he was not obedient. His mother, a good woman, would send him to a Sabbath school. After reaching the Sabbath school, he often used to run away. His teacher would then run after him to try to bring him back. But Joseph was a tall lad and he could run faster than his teacher.

This went on for two years. No one knew what to do with him. But a Sabbath came which was the last day he ran away. As usual he had joined other boys and was playing in a wood with them. He was cutting his name into the bark of a tree when he heard a noise like a gust of wind. Then these words flashed into his mind: "I will bring thee to judgement".

Joseph was terrified. He felt God was speaking to him. He ran away as fast as he could. He told himself: "I shall be in hell before I get out of this wood". He was quite breathless when he reached an open space beyond the trees.

God had used words like those in Ecclesiastes 11:9 to awaken Joseph to a sense of need as a guilty sinner. And God, in His mercy, did not allow him to slip away from that sense of his guilt. Joseph thought of himself as in a large black valley with all the devils in hell chasing him; he felt there was no way to escape. He seems also to have had a sense that God's justice was pursuing him. He did not know what to do.

He told his minister: "I am lost. I'm a lost sinner."

His minister pointed out that he had been given a lot of good teaching in the Sabbath school.

"I hated it all then," Joseph confessed, before adding, "now I remember

everything as though I had been taught the other day. All my sins are before me. God is just in condemning me. The Saviour hides His face from me, and I can see nothing but eternal wrath. What shall be done?”

And Joseph discovered the answer to his question. It was to look to Christ by faith, for He died for sinners like Joseph.

Joseph did not live for long. But he died in faith, declaring that the death of Christ was for him.

His minister quoted the words: “Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment” (Ecclesiastes 11:9). Then he added: “There is no escape. You must either be judged here [in your conscience] and be saved, or at the bar of [God’s] judgement, where there is no mercy, where it will be the wrath to come that will follow.”

Joseph obeyed the call: “Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon” (Isaiah 55:6,7). These words are addressed to you too.

“One More Exact Translation”

6. The Right Methods

Matthew Vogan

This Youth Conference paper tells some of the story behind the Authorised Version of the Bible, which was first published exactly 400 years ago, in 1611. Last month’s article described the right principles of translation, including faithfulness, honesty and accuracy.

The translators were divided into six companies (or panels) of translators in Oxford, Cambridge and London. They were assigned portions of the Old and New Testaments, and the Apocrypha (which was at the time included in all Bibles).

The Apocryphal books are in no way the inspired Word of God; their value is limited to providing historical background for the period between the Old and New Testaments. None of the writers claim inspiration. The Jewish Church never acknowledged them as sacred Scriptures and they are not quoted in the New Testament.

The panels were instructed that each member should make their own translation and, after this, they should come together to compare them and

agree on the right renderings. Once they had discussed and agreed on the translation of the books allotted to that company, they sent their work to the other companies for review and received theirs in return. Thus every translator got the chance to review the whole Bible.

It appears that the work of review was done orally in a very efficient way that made best use of everyone's gifts, as John Selden recorded: "The translation in King James' time took an excellent way. That part of the Bible was given to him who was most excellent in such a tongue . . . and then they met together, and one read that translation, the rest holding in their hands some Bible, either of the learned tongues, or French, Italian, Spanish, etc. If they found any fault, they spoke; if not, he read on."

The benefit of this method was that it made prominent the way in which a word or phrase sounded to the ear. This was a critical matter for a Bible which was to be read in Church, particularly at a time when many still could not read for themselves.

The complete work, with all of the questions and suggested alterations from this process, was then reviewed by a group of 12 delegates, consisting of two men from each company. They met at the Stationers' Hall, in London, and took nine months in all. Following this process, Thomas Bilson and Miles Smith reviewed the whole work. After this the work was sent to bishops and other leading churchmen for approval.

The Preface to the Translation explains this work of comparing, discussing, consulting authorities and agreeing on revisions: "Neither did we disdain to revise that which we had done, and to bring back to the anvil that which we had hammered: but having and using as great helps as were needful, and fearing no reproach for slowness, nor coveting praise for expedition [speed], we have at the length, through the good hand of the Lord upon us, brought the work to that pass that you see".

Robert Morrison

4. The Firstfruits of a Great Harvest

In September 1807 Morrison reached Guangzhou, then known as Canton; he was the first-ever Protestant missionary in China. His first priority was to translate the Bible. After he distributed some books from the New Testament, Chinese officials announced an edict making it illegal to print or publish Christian books in China.

At that time the London Missionary Society was sending out a new worker, Robert Milne, and his wife. In the new climate created by the edict, Morrison knew that it was now less likely that the Milnes would be allowed

to settle in Guangzhou. At that time, he was living in Macau, a Portuguese colony, working steadily on the vital task of translating the New Testament, so that people in China might have access to the good news of salvation. That was why he had come so far and was enduring so much hardship.

At last, one afternoon in July 1813, the ship carrying the Milnes sailed into Macau. Morrison did all in his power to secure permission from the authorities there for the Milnes to settle in the colony. But only five days after they arrived, Morrison was summoned to appear before the Governor. The decision was clear: Milne must leave within eight days. Behind the decision there was opposition from the Chinese and also from the local Roman Catholics. One might have expected some support from the British merchants who were trading in the colony, but they were afraid that, if they offered support, it would damage their business.

Soon the Milnes sailed to Guangzhou, and the Morrisons followed them not long afterwards. In spite of the edict, it proved possible for the missionaries to settle in Guangzhou; yet they realised that the authorities might strike at any moment. In the meantime they continued with their work – Morrison with his translations while Milne went on learning Chinese. At least the new missionary had Morrison's help in his difficult task – what Milne described as “a work for men with bodies of brass, lungs of steel, heads of oak, eyes of eagles, hearts of Apostles, memories of angels and lives of Methuselah”.

By the end of 1813, the whole New Testament had been translated and printed. If we were to assess events properly, it was probably the most important happening in the whole of China's history. Yet Morrison knew that the translation was not perfect, but it was one which ordinary people were able to understand; it was not in a form of speech that only educated people could follow.

The time had now come for the work to move to a new stage: to try to get the printed Word of God into the hands of Chinese people. It was clearly difficult, perhaps impossible, to do so at this time in China itself. But many thousands of Chinese were living in parts of Malaysia and Indonesia (to call these countries by their modern names). Perhaps, Morrison and Milne thought, if some of these people were converted, some of them might come back to China as missionaries. They would be able to move around China without attracting suspicion, in a way that Europeans could not do.

In 1814 Milne sailed away from China and landed in Bangka, one of the many Indonesian islands. Wherever he went on his travels, he gave out tracts and New Testaments in Chinese. He moved to Jakarta, Indonesia's capital, on the island of Java. There he had the support of the Dutch Governor, who

arranged for Milne's expenses to be paid as he visited various parts of inland Java, which is the main island in Indonesia. From there Milne sailed to Malacca, in Malaysia, and continued his work of distribution.

After seven or eight months of travelling, although he could have moved on to another district of Malaysia, it was time to return to Guangzhou. Back in China, Milne joined Morrison to consider where a new mission might be organised, where it would be safe to set up a printing press and where they might be able to train Chinese missionaries who would go back to their own country and spread the gospel. After much thought, the two men decided on Malacca, particularly because it had good transport links with other parts of south and east Asia.

That year, 1814, marked a milestone in Morrison's missionary work in China; he baptised the first convert, a man called Tsae A-Ko. "May he be the firstfruits of a great harvest", exclaimed Morrison, expressing his faith in the power and the goodness of God.

Another huge project had also been completed: Morrison's Chinese dictionary. It was going to be massively expensive to print it. But the East India Company, who employed Morrison to do translation work, stepped in; the dictionary would be of enormous help to their business. They brought out a printing press and a printer from Britain and spent £10 000 on producing copies of the dictionary (over £1 million in today's money).

But Morrison's main interest was in circulating the Scriptures. The Bible Society in London also recognised the importance of China as a mission field, and of the Scriptures as a necessary instrument in advancing mission work; so they twice gave a grant of £500 towards printing the Chinese New Testament. And one of the directors of the East India Company left \$1000 to Morrison to advance the Christian religion.

Morrison used this money to pay for producing a pocket-sized edition of the New Testament. The first edition had been printed as a rather large volume. Not only would it have been heavy to carry around, but the authorities – so hostile to the Christian religion – would be likely to discover copies more easily, and then seize and destroy them. This new edition could be carried about very readily, in the baggy sleeves of the Chinese dress. In this way, many people left Guangzhou to travel inland with one or more copies of the New Testament tucked up their sleeves or packed away among their belongings.

Morrison must have been hopeful as he saw the Word of God being spread in Guangzhou and into other parts of the country. It must have encouraged him to look and pray for some more early signs of the great harvest which, through God's blessing, he trusted would yet appear.

For Junior Readers

What Is Life Worth?

Perhaps you have heard about the death of Steve Jobs. It was front page news in the newspapers on October 7. Many columns of print were devoted to describing his life and what he did. And many people who were interviewed spoke of him with admiration. Timelines were published to display his many achievements.

Who was he? He ran companies involved in computing and internet technology. He designed, developed and marketed the Apple series, one of the first types of personal computers that were a success for their makers. He was described as a “creative genius” whose brilliance and energy were the source of many new products which many of you will be familiar with: for example, the iPod, the iPhone and the iPad. He was a billionaire.

But, in spite of all this, he died. At the age of 56 he had to leave it all behind and enter the great eternity. Was he prepared for that solemn day? It seems he did not believe in God or in any organised religion. He was described as an “atheist who was influenced by Buddhist philosophy”. So, after being rich, famous and successful in this world, he had to leave it all behind and go to meet his Maker.

Does it remind you of Solomon? He too was rich and famous and successful. But, when he looked back on his life, he said: “I made me great works; I builded me houses . . . I gathered me also silver and gold . . . so I was great, and increased more than all that were before me . . . and whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them”.

What then? Did it make him happy? “Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun” – no profit in the light of eternity.

And what did Jesus say? “What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

How then must we weigh the achievements of Jobs’ life? We must learn from Solomon’s words and say, Whatever you gain or achieve it is really worth nothing if you lose your soul!

But what about you, as you look back over another year which is now almost at an end? Whatever successes you have had, whatever things you have bought, whatever awards you have received, and however much pleasure these things have brought you, they are worth nothing if your soul

is not saved. Will you not think of the salvation of your soul as the most important thing for the year ahead, God sparing you?

Let us note some more of Solomon's words: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgement, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."

For Younger Readers

God Hears Prayer

The man was bad to his wife. Why? Because she went to church. Sometimes he sent her outside at night, even in winter.

She did not want other people to see her, so she went away into the fields and prayed. What do you think she prayed for most?

She prayed that God would convert her husband. She knew that all things are possible with God. She decided to pray for him for an hour every day for a whole year.

But nothing happened. What could she do? She decided to pray for her husband for six months more.

On the last day of the six months she went to pray for him as usual about 12 o'clock. She was afraid God did not want to convert at husband.

But she was wrong. Soon her husband came home from work very sad. He did not sit down for dinner as usual but went straight to his bedroom.

His wife followed him and was so glad to see him praying. Then he went back to work for the afternoon.

When he came home again, his wife asked him what was wrong.

He told her that, about 12 o'clock (when she went to pray for him) a verse from the Bible came strongly into his mind. He could not get rid of it. He told her: "I am sure I am lost".

His wife told him to pray, but he answered, "It is of no use. There is no forgiveness for me."

He was very sad about how badly he used to behave to her. He asked her: "Will you forgive me?"

She told him: "O yes".

"Will you pray for me?"

"O yes."

"Will you pray for me *now*?"

At once they went down on their knees and prayed together. How happy she was that God heard her prayers. God does hear prayer.

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

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Looking Around Us

“Thy Kingdom Come”

David Livingstone was born in Blantyre, near Glasgow, in 1813, and became probably the best-known missionary of his time. In 1841 he joined Robert Moffat, another well-known Scottish missionary, in southern Africa.

Later Livingstone felt his work was to act as a pioneer and open up other parts of Africa to the gospel. He travelled many thousands of miles, on foot, through large parts of the centre of the continent, keeping a diary to record his experiences. At one stage he had no ink or paper left. Ever resourceful, he made ink from berry seeds and wrote over the pages of a copy of the *London Standard* he had taken with him, which has been preserved at the David Livingstone Centre in Blantyre. But, after 140 years, the ink faded so badly that it became impossible to read Livingstone’s writing.

Now an international team of experts have made Livingstone’s account of the “unspeakable horror” of the slave trade readable again. They shone various wavelengths of light on the manuscript, starting with ultraviolet, before working through the visible spectrum and ending with infrared. They produced digital images of the pages and then used computer techniques to enhance the text.

Livingstone’s diary records how he watched as three Arab slave traders carried guns into a market in a Congolese village where 1500 people, mostly women, were gathered. “Two guns were fired,” Livingstone wrote, “and a general flight took place – shot after shot followed on the terrified fugitives – great numbers died. It is awful, terrible, a dreadful world this.” No wonder the slave trade occupied so much of Livingstone’s attention in his later life, as he campaigned for it to be abolished.

What best illustrates Livingstone’s attitudes is the petition that follows his description of the massacre: “O let thy kingdom come”. He had seen terrible evidence of human depravity, and he knew there was no remedy but the grace of God. So he longed for the coming of God’s kingdom; he no doubt prayed that God would send the gospel with power and so change the hearts of people everywhere – including those in Congolese villages in danger of being captured as slaves, or of being ruthlessly slain, and also hardened slave traders who did not know the meaning of the word *mercy*.

As we read about human cruelty today, we too should long for the spread of the gospel and that the Holy Spirit would apply it powerfully to large numbers of people. Yet, first of all, we should be concerned to believe the gospel ourselves. Then let us take up Livingstone’s petition, based on the Lord’s prayer, “Thy kingdom come”.

A Brand Plucked out of the Fire

Here John Newton reflects on his conversion, in the light of Zechariah 3:1-5.

With Satan, my accuser, near,
My spirit trembled when I saw
The Lord in majesty appear,
And heard the language of His law.

In vain I wished and strove to hide
The tattered filthy rags I wore;
While my fierce foe insulting cried,
“See what you trusted in before!”

Struck dumb, and left without a plea,
I heard my gracious Saviour say,
“Know, Satan, I this sinner free,
I died to take his sins away.

This is a brand which I, in love,
To save from wrath and sin design.
In vain thy accusations prove;
I answer all, and claim him mine.”

At His rebuke the tempter fled;
Then He removed my filthy dress;
“Poor sinner, take this robe,” He said,
“It is thy Saviour’s righteousness.

And see, a crown of life prepared!
That I might thus thy head adorn
I thought no shame or suffering hard,
But wore for thee a crown of thorn.”

O how I heard these gracious words!
They broke and healed my heart at once;
Constrained me to become the Lord’s,
And all my idol-gods renounce.

Now, Satan, thou hast lost thy aim,
Against this brand thy threats are vain;
Jesus has plucked it from the flame,
And who shall put it in again?

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