

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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After Death What?

As I walked past a cemetery recently, I noticed these words on a man's gravestone: "My atoms return to the air and the earth of this beautiful planet". Is the statement true or false?

In fact it is largely true (though it would have been better to have spoken about molecules than atoms). But if we consider the statement carefully, we may realise that something important has been missed out.

As always, we should consider such questions in the light of the Bible. Someone might point out that the Bible has nothing to say about atoms, and that is true because no one knew about atoms, in the time when the Bible was written. Yes, of course, God knew, but no one who read Scripture then would have understood anything it might have said about atoms. But it does not matter that the Bible does not speak about atoms; it tells us enough to consider usefully what was written on the gravestone – to help us recognise what is right and what is wrong about it.

First, we must agree that the earth is beautiful. And that should remind us that God created it. If the earth had evolved by a whole succession of random changes, there is no reason to believe that it would be beautiful. But God created the earth and everything in it and He gave to us human beings a sense of what is beautiful. This is something for which we should thank God.

Next, if we turn to Ecclesiastes 12:7, we read about death: "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was". In the beginning, "the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground" (Genesis 2:7). And when people die, their bodies decay and their atoms will return to the earth and possibly some of them will pass into the air.

But this is not the whole story about us. We have bodies, but we are more than bodies; we also have souls. So Ecclesiastes 12:7 goes on: "And the spirit shall return unto God who gave it". The spirit (or soul) – the part of us we cannot see with our eyes, the part that thinks – does not come to an end when we die; the spirit continues to exist; it will exist for ever. This is the important matter that has been missed out in the statement on the gravestone.

So we should ask, What will happen when the spirit returns to God? What

will happen to *my* spirit? Will God take it to heaven? The answer is: Only if my sin has been forgiven before death. And people are forgiven only if they believe on Jesus Christ as the One who came into the world to save sinners. We should then recognise the tremendous importance of being ready to die, of having been prepared for heaven. We should recognise the tremendous importance of having our sins forgiven and of believing on Jesus Christ.

We must trust our souls to Christ, so that we may be forgiven because of what He did in this world in the place of sinners, and so that our sins may be washed away. Unless we do so, we will continue to be responsible for our sins; we will for ever have to bear the punishment that is due to us. God is absolutely righteous; He cannot just pass by sin; He must punish it.

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, He had come into this world to bear away the sins of others. He took these sins to the cross; He suffered for them; He suffered the full punishment that was due to all who will believe on Him, until the world comes to an end.

How willing He is to receive sinners and to forgive them! And He is calling all who come in contact with the gospel – the good news of salvation for lost sinners. He calls them to come to Him, to trust in Him for salvation. So He is calling *you* to come to Him, to believe on Him – and be saved. Especially He is calling you to come to Him and be forgiven, so that when you are passing into eternity, your sin will not be your responsibility – so that you will not have to be sent down to a lost eternity, to bear the punishment of your sin for ever. Christ says to you, “Come unto Me . . . and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). If you come, He will give you eternal life in heaven, in the rest that remains for the people of God (see Hebrews 4:9).

But we not only need to have our sins forgiven; we need to be made holy before we leave this world. We cannot enter heaven if we are still unholy; we cannot enter heaven if we are still less than perfectly holy. Yet when God makes people able to believe, He begins to make them holy. And if He begins the work of making them holy, He will continue that work till they *are* perfectly holy – which will be when they leave this world.

Think of Lydia, who earned her living selling purple cloth. Her business took her to Philippi, where she heard Paul preach the good news about Jesus Christ as a Saviour who can truly take away sin. As she listened, the Lord opened her heart so that she became able to receive the message that Paul brought to Philippi. She believed in Christ with all her heart; she trusted in Him for the salvation of her soul. She was forgiven; the guilt of all her sins was taken away; she could no longer be punished because of them.

What is more, Lydia was given a new heart, a holy heart. The beginnings of holiness began to appear in her whole way of life, including what she said

as she spoke to other people, and this all happened through the work of the Holy Spirit in her soul. As time passed, especially as she heard the Bible being read and the truth of the Bible being preached in the congregation that was set up in Philippi (see Philippians 1:1), her faith was strengthened and she became more holy. At last she died. We do not know when, but we do know that she went to heaven. And as she entered that place of perfect blessedness, she was made perfectly holy; no sin was left in her.

Many people want to think that, when they die, they will cease to exist. Their body will be buried in a grave and there it will decay (or their body may be burnt to ashes in a cremation, which is not a way the Bible points to for disposing of a body). But the question remains: What about the soul, which will exist for ever, either in heaven or in hell? How necessary to seek the Lord and His mercy, through Jesus Christ, and to do so now!

Yet every body, however it has been disposed of after death, will rise again. Everyone's body will be reunited to their soul on the last day of this world. Then "we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10). How much we need to be prepared for that day! Only those who believe in Christ are ready to die and to appear before God in judgement.

For Junior Readers

Who Does Not Change?

Eugenie was her real name but she was known as Jenya. Her father was Russian and worked in the timber industry. From his home town of Archangel, on the north coast of Russia, they traded with Dundee and, in 1903, he was sent there to gain some experience. While there he met a Scottish girl called Helen Cameron, whom he married and took back to Russia. Jenya was their daughter. She spent her early childhood in Archangel but was also taken on visits, by sea, to Dundee.

Archangel is built on the the Dvina River. In the summer the children played on the banks of the river and were taken on boat trips. In the winter it froze over and became like a road, on which everyone travelled by sledge. The town had wide cobbled streets, old churches and fine wooden houses. But life there was to change for ever with the First World War, and then the Russian Revolution. The country fell apart, and the people faced hunger and fear. Many people fled, including Jenya, her brother and mother, who returned to Dundee.

It was not until 70 years later, in 1990, that she was able to return with her husband to visit Archangel again. She found it was completely changed. Churches and other beautiful buildings had been destroyed. In place of her old family home, there was a hospital. Nothing remained of the beautiful garden and parks where she had played as a child. At the end of her visit she said, "Only the Dvina remains", meaning that the river which flows through the city was the only thing that had not changed.

And what does the Bible tell us? We come to the end of another year, when you may have experienced changes in your life and in your family. You may also face changes in the year ahead. But what remains the same? Who does not change and never will change? Perhaps you could look up a few verses which will answer that question:

Malachi 3:6 tells us, "I am the Lord, *I change not*";

In Psalm 102:27, the Psalmist addresses God: "But *Thou art the same*, and Thy years shall have no end";

Paul in Hebrews 1:12 says to the Lord, "*Thou art the same* and Thy years shall not fail";

And in Hebrews 13:8 he speaks of "Jesus Christ, *the same yesterday, and today, and for ever*".

Should that not be a comfort to you in this uncertain world in which we live; in Britain, where even the Government seems to be in confusion – yet the Lord never changes, He is in control and He will always be the same. You could also learn verses 26 and 27 of Psalm 102 – which are spoken to God about the earth and everything else He has created – and carry these verses with you into the New Year:

"*Thou shalt for evermore endure*, but they shall perish all;

Yea, every one of them wax old, like to a garment, shall:

Thou, as a vesture, shalt them change, and they shall changed be:

But *Thou the same art*, and Thy years are to eternity".

The Four Rooms

Rev K M Watkins

Rev Finlay Cook was a godly and much-loved gospel minister. He was one of the many faithful men who left the Church of Scotland in the 1843 Disruption to form the Free Church of Scotland. A year later, when he had not long moved into the new Free Church manse in Reay, on the north coast of Caithness, he wrote a letter to a dear friend. He spoke of four rooms, each of which represented different aspects of spiritual experience.

He wrote, “The first room I have is *Who can tell?* This is a very large room, but a very cold one, and I would not advise my friends to stay long in it”. In Jonah 3:9, the Ninevites said, “*Who can tell* if God will turn and repent, and turn away from His fierce anger, that we perish not?” Jonah had threatened Nineveh with overthrow in 40 days. The people of Nineveh believed the threat, and their King proclaimed a fast and required everyone to cry mightily to God and to turn from their evil way. The Ninevites did this, but they did not know whether the Lord would be merciful to them. That is why they asked, “Who can tell?”

You can see why Cook called this first room “very cold”, for there is little comfort for a sinner when he is awakened to see his sin and begins to tremble at God’s judgments, and yet is unsure whether the Lord will forgive him or not. It is “a very large room”, for many sinners may be found in it, but it is not a room to remain in for long. “I would not advise my friends to stay long in it.” When a sinner is afraid of the Lord’s fierce anger, but cannot tell if He will turn from it, the sinner is still in a dangerous place.

Some are ready to tell awakened sinners, who are afraid of the wrath to come, but who have never come to faith in Christ for salvation, that they do not need to fear. They may even tell such sinners that their desire for deliverance is itself salvation. Mr Cook was not of that opinion; he was a better friend to sinners than to leave them with a false hope. The sinner needs to leave this first room as soon as possible. He needs to put His trust in the sure mercy and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This brings us to the second room. Mr Cook wrote, “The second room I have is *Good hope through grace*. This is a very fine room and I like to sit in it; but through my neglect the robbers come in and put the furniture out of order”. The name of this room comes from 2 Thessalonians 2:16, where Paul said that the Lord has loved His people and given them “everlasting consolation and good hope through grace”.

When a sinner is given saving grace to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, he now has a good hope. He may have been hoping that God would show him mercy before he was awakened, and before he came to Christ. But that was a false hope. The Bible calls that “the hope of the hypocrite” and says that it will “perish”; it will be “cut off”, for it is like a mere “spider’s web” (Job 8:13,14). Without faith in Christ, there is no hope of salvation for any sinner.

It is the sinner who has put his trust in Christ for salvation who can enter Cook’s second room. He called it “a very fine room”, and so it is. No wonder he liked to sit in it! The true child of God has a hope that will never let him down. It is built on the solid foundation of Jesus Christ and His

finished work. Well may the child of God sit down here, resting in the sure hope of eternal life, the hope that is laid up for him in heaven.

Yet Cook found a problem with this second room. Robbers kept coming into it, and then they would put all the furniture out of order. He admits that his own neglect was to blame. The Christian needs to keep a careful watch over his hope, so that nothing is allowed in to disturb it. But robbers are always trying to do that. Temptations to sin, compromises with the world, the lusts of the flesh, unbelief and pride, with every other sinful thing – these are the robbers that disturb the believer's sense of peace. When these come in, it is harder for him to see that he has a good hope.

Cook continued, "The third room is *Love*. This is a beautiful room, and there is always a fire in it, but I can seldom get access to it." What a lovely room this is! He was speaking of Christ's redeeming love to His people. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins (1 John 4:10). When the soul can say that "Christ loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20), truly that soul is in a beautiful place spiritually.

It is also a warm place, for "there is always a fire in it". When Christ opens up His saving love to souls in the gospel, their own hearts begin to burn within them. The sight of His love to them warms their hearts, and causes them to respond with love to Himself. "We love Him because He first loved us". While Jesus spoke to the two disciples on the Emmaus road, their hearts burned within them, because He spoke to them about Himself. He opened the Scriptures, using Moses and all the prophets as His texts. Blessed by the Holy Spirit, this meant that His love was shed abroad in their hearts.

Although this room of gospel love was so beautiful, warm and desirable, Cook complained, "I can seldom get access to it". He was a deeply exercised and spiritually-minded child of God, but that did not mean that he had the sense of Christ's love with him continually. Indeed, it was not with him ordinarily. It was seldom, or relatively rarely, that he could enjoy the assurance of his Saviour's love to this degree.

We should be warned by this. In many Evangelical circles today, and even in professedly Reformed circles too, many speak and pray as if they were in the room called Love all the time. It is as if they are always sure of the Lord's love to them. It is as if their hearts are always warm and full of praise and thanksgiving. In a day of small things, when there is so much compromise with the world and so little spiritual-mindedness, is it probable that professing Christians really spend more time in this room than men like Finlay Cook?

The fourth and final room was the best of all. Cook wrote, "The fourth

room I have is *The secret chamber*. The King Himself sits here and we cannot get in until He opens the door and brings us in, and makes His banner over us to be *Love*.” When the King is at home, this is the room He sits in Himself. No one can gain entry into it without Him opening the door.

Cook was speaking of enjoying spiritual communion and fellowship with Christ. So does the Church in the Song of Solomon when she says, “The King hath brought me into His chambers” (1:4). She could not bring herself into this spiritual experience of being so near to Him. He Himself brought her into this inner room, where He opens up His heart to those He loves. Here He feasts their souls on rich gospel provisions. This is the banqueting house, where His banner over them is love.

Cook was saying that to enjoy Christ like this depends on His own sovereign will and good pleasure. We cannot force Him to let us into this room. He opens the door to this room only when it pleases Him. But that should not stop His people seeking entry to it! “Draw me, we will run after Thee”, was the prayer of the bride before the King brought her in (Song 1:4).

Each of these four rooms brings the sinner nearer and nearer to Christ. It will be good for us to be going from room to room. But what of those who have never been in any of them? Poor souls! What will be done for those who have never become concerned for their souls? They have not come as far as the Ninevites, to cry out, “Who can tell?” They have never placed a foot even in the first room, for they do not care about finding salvation. On the Day of Judgement, the men of Nineveh will rise and condemn them, for they repented when they heard Jonah’s preaching, and they looked to the Lord for forgiveness.

Note: The letter on which this article is based is one of many which, along with those of his brother, Rev Archibald Cook, are included in the excellent 210-page book, *Sidelights on Two Notable Ministries*, available from the Free Presbyterian Bookroom.

John Calvin – His Life and Work

6. A Great Work in Geneva

Mr F R Daubney

The last section of this Youth Conference paper told of Calvin’s return to Geneva after he had been expelled, and of his work in that city, in spite of his ill health.

To return to church government. The preachers and elders made up the Council of the Elders, which met every Thursday to discuss all matters about the Church. Open sinners were brought before them and questioned

in a brotherly fashion. If they showed understanding, they were dismissed in a friendly way but, if they persisted after being repeatedly reprimanded, they were expelled from the congregation – that is, they were refused admission to the Lord's Table for as long as they did not repent and reform.

For secret sins, an account was to be given in secret. No one was to drag his neighbour before the Council without having first attempted to correct him. This church discipline was regarded by many as strict and overly invasive. Yet it was necessary if Calvin wanted to reach the goal of turning immoral and greedy citizens into a strong and faithful people for God.

Merle d'Aubigné quotes the historian August Cramer: "Without the transformation of morals, the Reformation in Geneva would only have been a change in the form of worship. The foundations for a more serious struggle would have been lacking. Nothing less than Calvin's genius was needed in order to inspire people, to transform Geneva completely, and to infuse it with new life. It was unavoidable to subject all external actions of life to a severe discipline. The pressure of this discipline in the sixteenth century must not be measured with nineteenth-century [let alone twenty-first-century] attitudes. Everywhere at this time there existed the principle of unqualified obedience, the subjection was *more* bearable in Geneva precisely in the realisation that no one was exempted, no matter how high their position."

Similarly, the harsh punishments meted out to criminals in Geneva were in line with what happened elsewhere. The death penalty was imposed for crimes we would consider not worthy of death; torture was common and so were drownings. These were all the result of the law at that time, and Calvin had no power to remove them. Yet these things are used to condemn this Reformer as though they occurred because he wanted them.

At that time, in the sixteenth century, John Calvin was the foremost Reformer in biblical learning, debating skills and powers of speaking well. The errors which he opposed, in common with all the Reformers, arose from the elevation of human works and supposed merits into a position which God's grace and mercy alone can occupy. But Rome taught that salvation was secured by the efforts, gifts, services and self-sacrifice of sinful men.

The main principle of Calvin's doctrine was that salvation is the free gift of God, bestowed upon those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. To Calvin, God's sovereign mercy was most important, and that thought coloured the whole of his doctrinal system. The doctrine of predestination, a doctrine which attributes the origin of all good in the human soul to God's wisdom, was especially sacred and precious to Calvin, and he strenuously upheld it; yet his view of predestination was not fatalistic. He upheld the doctrine of justification, and taught that forgiveness and acceptance by God are assured

to every child of Adam who repents and believes the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Calvin's main principle was that visible churches are only the outer covering of the true and invisible Church – which is set up by the presence and operation of the Spirit of God. Another principle was that the state has no right to interfere in the spiritual sphere, especially with the discipline of the Church. Yet this principle was not carried out in Geneva with any consistency; the state substantially appointed the ministers of religion and paid them, and the lay element in the Council of Elders was appointed by the City Council. This meant the ordinary government of the Church was largely under the control of the state. Calvin's system recognised pastors, teachers and ruling elders as church officers who were involved in the spiritual government of the congregation, and also deacons, who gave relief to the poor. This church system in Geneva became the model, more or less, in countries, such as Scotland, where Protestantism took the Presbyterian form.

In the sixteenth century it was impossible to be neutral in the struggle between the Papacy and the Reformation. Both in his *Institutes* and in his many commentaries on Scripture, Calvin took every opportunity to attack the errors of the Church of Rome, especially its doctrine of salvation by works and merit as opposed to the doctrine of salvation by grace, through faith.

The great controversy of the time, of course, related to the Lord's Supper. The Church of Rome had made what they called the sacrifice of the mass the central part of their worship. Luther rejected the sacrificial aspect of the Lord's Supper but retained a belief in the real presence of the body and blood of the Lord Jesus, "in" the elements of bread and wine. The Swiss Reformers were more sweeping in their rejection of papal superstition. Calvin taught that the communicants receive the body and blood of Christ, not in "a corporal and carnal" manner, but by faith; this doctrine has been generally received by the Reformed Churches.

In 1543, and not for the first time, the plague broke out in Geneva. The victims were crowded into an infirmary which every healthy person avoided because this was the first step to a terrible death. Pastor Blanchett, who had already taken care of the diseased on a previous occasion, once again took over this dangerous duty. Calvin wrote, "I fear that, if something happens to Blanchett, it will be up to me to take his place. But we belong to every member of our flock and cannot withdraw ourselves from those who most need our assistance".

Blanchett sadly did fall victim to the plague, but the Council was determined not to put Calvin's life in danger. They ordered the preachers to select one of their number to minister to the plague victims but said, "Master

Calvin is barred because the Church needs him". When the preachers refused to go, Calvin insisted he would go, but the Council again refused. Finally de Geneston, a French pastor, volunteered to serve in the plague hospital. His brethren were dismissed from the Geneva Church during the next years for lack of ability.

For Younger Readers

"I Can't Pray"

John Coutts was the captain of a ship. On one voyage he took ill. As he lay on his back in bed in his cabin, he felt sure that he was going to die. He was a wicked man. His sins were not forgiven; so he could not go to heaven. He knew that he was not prepared to die and to meet God.

Captain Coutts wanted someone to pray for him. What a pity Coutts did not try to pray for himself, to tell God that he was going to die and that he needed to have his sins forgiven. So he sent for Williams, the first officer, who was the most important man on the ship, after the Captain. The Captain told Williams that he felt very ill and he told Williams to pray for him.

Williams answered, "I'm not a praying man, Captain. I can't pray." How sad!

"Well," the Captain then told Williams, "bring your Bible and read me a bit."

Williams could only say, "I've no Bible, Captain".

So the Captain asked him to send for the second officer, called Thomas. The Captain asked him to go down on his knees "and pray if you can".

Thomas answered, "I'd do it, Captain, if I could. But since I was a lad I've never prayed."

"Have you a Bible, then?" asked Captain Coutts.

"No", was the man's answer to this question too. The second officer was then sent to call the third officer. But he was no more able to help the Captain than either of the other two men. He could not pray, nor had he a Bible.

Poor Captain Coutts! He was dying. He needed to be saved from his sins. And none of these men could help him. So they searched the whole ship to see if they could find someone who could pray or who had a Bible.

At last, someone said that he had seen a boy who helped the cook with his work in the galley – which is what a ship’s kitchen is called. And the man said that the boy was holding what looked like a Bible. His name was William Platt.

“Just see if he has one and bring him here”, the Captain ordered the man.

The man went away to find William. And William came to the Captain’s cabin. “Have you a Bible?” Coutts asked him.

“Yes”, William answered. But he was afraid he might get a row for reading it when he should have been working. So he added, “But I only read it in my own time”.

“That’s all right, boy,” Coutts told him. The Captain was not interested in what William might have been doing. All he wanted was to hear what the Bible had to say about salvation from sin.

So he told young William to go for his Bible. “Fetch it,” the Captain said to him, “and sit down here and find out something that will help me. I’m going to die. Find something about God having mercy on sinners.”

William remembered that his mother often made him read Isaiah, chapter 53, which tells about Jesus suffering in the place of sinners. So William turned to that chapter and began to read. He reached verse 5, which says about Jesus: “But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed”.

Captain Coutts knew that it might be the last time he would hear God’s Word. So he was listening carefully. He asked William to stop and read the verse again. He must have recognised that here was the good news about salvation for sinners, the good news he needed so badly.

Then the Captain sent William away. He had heard what he needed to hear. He lay back and repeated verse 5 to himself over

and over again. Before he died, he spoke to everyone on the ship. He told them that Jesus was wounded for his transgressions; that Jesus was bruised for his iniquities, and that by Jesus' stripes John Coutts was healed.

How much you too need to pray! How much you need to listen to what God is saying in the Bible! Sometime you will die; so how important it is to have your sins forgiven before then!

Life of David, Sweet Psalmist of Israel

1. Anointed as King

Dr R J Dickie

This is the first part of a paper given at the 2018 Youth Conference.

This paper will consider David, who came from obscurity to become the second king over the united kingdom of Israel and Judah. No other figure features so prominently in Old Testament *history*. Over 900 verses mention his name – about 200 verses more than those that mention Moses. If we look at how often the name of David appears in the whole Old Testament, we find him named 1080 times – over 300 times more than Moses. And we find a further 59 references to him in the New Testament.

Introduction. We are going to look at the vast topic of the life of David, the sweet psalmist of Israel. This will focus on the main events in his life, and I will conclude with a brief survey of the Psalms of David.

David is a complex figure. We know him as a majestic king and a lowly shepherd, as a valiant warrior and a skillful harp-player, as a ruthless opponent and a tender man. And, of course, we know him as a writer of psalms. In his 40 years as a ruler, between approximately 1010 BC and 970 BC, he united the people of Israel, led them to victory in battle, conquered new territories, and paved the way for his son, Solomon, to build the First Temple at Jerusalem.

No other figure has the magnetism that makes David such a beloved hero. The stories about David are tales of intrigue and adventure, tenderness and pain. It has been said that Israel revered Moses but loved David.

Almost all our knowledge of David comes from historical books of the Bible: 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 Kings and 1 Chronicles, and most of what we learn about his life and times is contained in the books of Samuel. The accounts in 1 and 2 Samuel include what we may call the difficult or adverse episodes in his life, whereas the accounts in Chronicles portray him particularly as the

founder of the temple and organiser of its worship. In addition to the historical accounts, we get further insights into the experiences of David in the Psalms he wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Background. What do we know about the background of David? From the genealogies in the New Testament we find that he was a direct descendent of Ruth the Moabite. “Boaz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse; and Jesse begat David the king.” So David was a great-grandson of Boaz and Ruth. Jesse was his father, but we are not told the name or lineage of David’s mother.

David’s father Jesse was a prominent citizen in Bethlehem and was a member of the tribe of Judah. Jesse was a farmer, a breeder and owner of sheep. We are told he had eight sons and the youngest of these was David. He was born around 1040 BC.

In 1 Chronicles we have the names of seven of the sons of Jesse – Eliab, Abinadab, Shimma, Nethaneel, Raddai, Ozem and David. This list contains just seven names rather than eight, suggesting that one may have died. The Bible also provides us with the names of Jesse’s two daughters, Zeruiah and Abigail. In passing, we can just notice that David’s great military commanders were his own nephews: Joab, Abishai and Asahel (the sons of Zeruiah) and Amasa (the son of Abigail).

The anointing of David. David began his working life as a shepherd in Bethlehem, looking after the flock of his father. We are introduced to David in a quite remarkable way. One day, the prophet Samuel called him out of the field and anointed him king without the knowledge of the current king, Saul. Let us consider the reason for this anointing in place of Saul.

And we may start by looking at the appointment of Saul as king. You will remember that he had been looking for his father’s asses and was taken aback when Samuel anointed him as king (1 Samuel 10:1). Later, Saul unlawfully offered a sacrifice (1 Samuel 13:8-14) and then disobeyed God’s instruction to kill all the Amalekites and to destroy their confiscated property (1 Samuel 15:1-28). God was angered by these rebellious acts, and he told Samuel: “It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king: for he is turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments”.

God then sent Samuel to intimate solemnly his displeasure to Saul: “Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, He hath also rejected thee from being king”. Though Saul expressed remorse, Samuel faithfully addressed him: “The Lord hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbour of thine, that is better than thou. And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for He is not a man, that He should repent.”

God then sent the same prophet Samuel to anoint David to be king instead (1 Samuel 16:1-13). We read of Samuel's fear when he got the commission to go, as he was afraid of Saul. It must have been a solemn moment for Samuel once more to anoint a man chosen by God. "Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the Lord said, Arise, anoint him: for this is he."

He was ruddy or reddish, either in his skin or hair, and a beautiful young man. His other brothers were also handsome, but the important character of David was not his outward appearance but his heart. We see this when Samuel went to Bethlehem and met with Jesse and his family. When he saw Eliab, "the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart". We are not told the way in which the heart of David differed from his brothers, but he was the one the Lord had chosen and God said to Samuel: "Arise, anoint him: for this is he".

Let us now look at this event from David's viewpoint. No doubt it was a strange providence for David – he had been anointed as king unexpectedly, and then returned to the work of a shepherd. David knew that there was a promise of God about him becoming the king in reality, and this must have perplexed him in his later interactions with Saul.

David as a musician. David's first interaction with Saul came after "an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him [Saul]". His servants suggested sending for a "cunning player on an harp" to help him and Saul agreed to their suggestion. Matthew Henry says, "It would have been better if they had advised him to give all diligence to make his peace with God by true repentance, to send for Samuel to pray with him and to intercede with God for him". But their aim was to make him merry.

Note that David is described as "cunning in playing, and a mighty valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters, and a comely person". The reference to his prowess in battle is intriguing as there are no details about how this aspect of his character had been developed. Some commentators have suggested that he may have had to fight off men who tried to raid his flock.

As a result of David's musical skill, "Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him." He therefore kept David in his service as a musician. And David "loved him greatly and he became his armour-bearer", in the full knowledge that he would one day succeed to the throne in place of Saul.

The Young People's Magazine

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Editor: Rev Kenneth D Macleod

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

Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland

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Youth Conference in Australia

The 2020 Youth Conference in Australia will be held, God willing, from 1.30 pm on Tuesday, January 7, till 3 pm on Thursday, January 9, at Alstonville Country Cottages, about 1 hour and 50 minutes' drive north from Grafton. The Lower age limit is 16. The cost is AUD\$120. Payments can be made on arrival at the conference, but please e-mail Rev Jett Smith as soon as possible to tell him that you intend to attend (jettddaniel@gmail.com). The papers and speakers are expected to be as follows:

1. **Genesis: the Beginning of Lessons for Christians** *Mr Hank Optland*
2. **Biblical Repentance** *Rev G G Hutton*
3. **John Calvin - The Man, the Theologian, the Pastor, the Legacy** *Mr C MacKenzie*
4. **The Church's Preparation for Revival** *Rev C Hembd*
5. **The Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland – Past, Present and Purpose** *Rev J D Smith*

Looking Around Us

Observing Christmas

Christianity Today is an American religious magazine but not one that anyone would associate with opposition to observing Christmas. Yet it has recently published an article which states, "For the first three centuries of Christianity [till about AD 300], Christmas wasn't in December". It points out that Origen, a prominent preacher and writer in Alexandria in Egypt who lived from about AD 185 to 254, "preached that it would be wrong to honour Christ in the same way Pharaoh and Herod were honoured. Birthdays were for pagan gods."

Others accepted that the day of Christ's birth should be celebrated, but their ideas of when Christ was born were all over the calendar; they included January 2, March 21, March 25, April 18, April 19, May 20, May 28, November 17 and November 20, as well as December 25. But if God had wanted us to celebrate the birth of Jesus on the day when He was born in Bethlehem, He would surely have told us in the Bible when it took place. And He would have given a direct command to observe such a day.

But God gave no such command. And we do not find the Apostles or anyone else in the New Testament observing Christmas. The choice eventually of December 25 for the birth of Jesus seems to have had more to do with identifying the Son of God with the sun in the heavens than anything else.

December 25 was more or less when the sun began to rise again in the sky during the northern winter and was already the time of a heathen festival. Surely, with such heathen motives behind the choice, we should have nothing to do with the observance of Christmas. Yet every day we should remember that Christ came into the world to deliver people from sin and from its consequences.

How Not to Treat Death

A year before he died, a man from Dublin had a strange wish that left his family and friends laughing at his funeral. He made a video that has proved very popular on an internet site; in it he pretends to be trapped inside his coffin and is heard knocking frantically, trying to get out. Coming from a speaker on the ground his voice boomed out at his funeral, as if from his grave: “Hello, hello, hello . . . let me out!” There is then some swearing which sends those who attended the funeral into fits of laughter. He goes on to sing: “Hello again, hello. I called to say goodbye”.

His son Jonathan told the BBC that his father was “a larger-than-life character who always wanted to make people laugh”. He did not want anyone, especially his wife, to leave the graveside looking sad.

And the man’s daughter told those who wanted to send their sympathy: “My dad wanted us to leave the cemetery laughing, and to celebrate his life. . . . He would love to know how many people he made laugh!”

But death is not a time for merriment, and there is never an appropriate time for swearing. It is a very serious matter for a soul to pass into eternity and to meet one’s Maker. It is also a time when bonds have been broken between the one who has died and his relations and friends. Especially the bond between husband and wife is broken. The bond between parents and children is broken also. And if the relationship between them was anything like it should have been, the breaking of that relationship will be painful.

If there had been no sin in the world, there would have been no death. Every death we hear about is a reminder that we ourselves are sinners and we need to be prepared for eternity. We need to have our sins forgiven; we need to be made holy. We need to be made fit to enter into the presence of the holy God. So death demands a serious response from those who are left behind, which can be summed up: repent and believe the gospel (see Mark 1:15). And the gospel can be summed up: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15).

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