

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



April 2021

Vol 86 • No 4

Contents

Before the Opportunity Slips Away	63
The Covenanters: What They Teach Us:	
4. What They Suffered	66
“Yea, Hath God Said?”	69
Assurance of Being Saved:	
2. Is It Possible?	72
Ten Pounds for Ten Verses	74
Paid to Go to Church	76
For Junior Readers:	
“Behold the Lamb of God”	76
For Younger Readers:	
A Bad Builder	77
A Powerful Saviour	78
Looking Around Us	79
Children Called to Christ	80

Cover Picture: St Paul’s Cathedral, London. See page 77.

The Young People’s Magazine

Published by the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. Scottish charity number SC003545.

Editor: Rev Kenneth D Macleod BSc, 11 Auldcastle Road, Inverness, IV2 3PZ. Tel: 01463 712872; e-mail: kdmacleod@gmail.com. All unsigned articles are by the Editor.

Material for the magazine should reach the editor by the beginning of the previous month.

Subscriptions, Renewals, Changes of Address should be sent to the General Treasurer: Mr W Campbell, 133 Woodlands Road, Glasgow, G3 6LE; e-mail: wc.fpchurch@btconnect.com; tel: 0141 332 9283. The subscription year ends in December, and subscriptions should be sent in January each year for the following 12 months. Subscription rates, including postage, are: F P Magazine £26.00 (£2.00 per copy); Y P Magazine £15.00 (£1.00 per copy); both magazines £39.00. All queries should be directed to the General Treasurer, not to the printer.

Free Presbyterian Magazine: The Church’s main magazine is *The Free Presbyterian Magazine*. Send to the General Treasurer at the above address for a free sample copy. See above for subscription rates.

The Young People's Magazine

Volume 86

April 2021

Number 4

Before the Opportunity Slips Away

It was a very difficult time in Judah. An enemy army from Assyria had invaded the country and it was now at the gates of Jerusalem, the capital city. King Hezekiah of Judah was seriously ill and it looked as if he would die. Indeed Isaiah, God's prophet, brought him a message: "Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live" (2 Kings 20:1). Hezekiah was very upset; there was at least one big question in his mind: Who could take his place as the ruler of Judah? He had no son then to follow him, and how could a country without a leader defeat a powerful army? It seemed very likely that the whole country would be overcome.

What could Hezekiah do? He did what was natural for a godly man like him – he began to pray to the Lord. Isaiah had not gone far away before God spoke to him again. He told the Prophet to go back to the King and tell him: "I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee". Indeed, he would be healed quickly – so quickly that on the third day he would be able to go up to the temple to worship God.

Of course, a time would come when Hezekiah would die, when his soul would pass into the eternal world. We can say something more: because Hezekiah was a godly man – because he trusted in God for the salvation of his soul – he would then go to heaven at once. But he was to be spared in this world for another 15 years, in answer to his prayer.

Yes, long ago, God used to hear prayer, and not only in Hezekiah's time, but in all ages of the world. What is more, He still hears prayer today. *We* should pray to God, whatever may be troubling us. Each of us should pray especially that God would save our souls. This is an important lesson to learn from this incident.

Yet what I wish especially to focus on in this article is God's direction to Hezekiah *to set his house in order* – he was to sort out the affairs of his household. If, for example, he owed money to various people in Jerusalem, it was his duty now to see that they were paid at once. Perhaps there were men who had done some work in repairing the royal palace; they must at once get the money that was owed to them. Or perhaps some of those who

had supplied food to the royal kitchen had not yet been paid; Hezekiah must quickly send them the money that was due to them.

We too must die. That should be obvious; we know that everyone must die; no one can live in this sinful world for ever. But, unlike Hezekiah, we do not know how long we will live; we cannot tell when we will die. Not even young people can promise themselves a further 15 years before they have to leave this world.

So, whether we are young or old, whether we are healthy or not, we must set the affairs of our soul in order, urgently. God says to each one of us: "Prepare to meet thy God" (Amos 4:12). We should be serious about the need to be ready for eternity, no matter how soon God may call us away.

If we consider seriously the affairs of our soul, we should quickly realise that there is much that needs to be put right. We are sinners, are we not? What then about the guilt of our sin? We deserve to be punished, and not only for a little while, nor even for a very long time. Sin is so serious that we deserve to be punished for ever and ever, because every sin is committed against a perfectly-holy God, the perfectly-holy God who created us and is keeping us in existence.

To be guilty is like having to pay off a debt. If it was an ordinary debt that we owed to someone else, we might just possibly find someone who would be willing to pay it instead of us. Perhaps loving parents would be willing to pay off the debt if it was in their power to do so. But who could we possibly find who would be able and willing to pay off our whole debt if it was very large indeed? We certainly cannot pay off the debt we owe to God because of our sins; that is totally beyond our power. No more can we find anyone who could pay it off for us, although we would search the whole world. The Bible tells us: "None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him" (Psalm 49:7). No one can deliver anyone else from the punishment of their sins; no one can pay the price that has to be paid; it is just far too great.

Is there then no hope of finding someone who can pay a ransom that will really take away the guilt of our sin, who can pay a ransom that will be great enough? I hope you already know who this is, but it should be clear that there is no one in this world – indeed no one among the angels – who can do this for us. But the Bible tells us that God "the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world" (1 John 4:14). Jesus, the Son of God, was indeed able to pay the ransom that was necessary so that sinners could go free, so that they might escape the punishment due to them because of their sins. He was not only able but willing to do so.

And everyone who believes in Him will "not perish, but have everlasting

life". So if you feel, as you ought to feel, the authority of God speaking to you in the Bible, and telling you to prepare for eternity – to set the affairs of your soul in order – you should also feel God's authority behind the words, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31).

A ship called the *Central America* was in poor repair and sprang a leak. She was beginning to sink and the captain ran up a flag as a distress signal (it was before radios were invented). Another ship saw the signal and came to the rescue; her captain asked what was wrong, speaking through a kind of trumpet. The captain of the *Central America* explained the problem and asked the other captain to wait till the morning. The captain of the rescue ship wanted to take the passengers of the *Central America* on board his ship at once, but he could not persuade the other captain.

Only an hour and a half later, the lights of the *Central America* disappeared. She had sunk and all on board were lost. Her captain should have sought safety for his passengers immediately. There was help within reach, if only the captain had made use of the rescue ship right away. Perhaps there was some difficulty; probably it was already dark and more dangerous to transfer the passengers. But the ship was already taking in water; so there was an urgency about the situation. Yet the captain of the *Central America* did not feel that urgency; he let his opportunity slip away.

How often sinners leave it too late before they seek salvation. Perhaps they mean to seek the Lord before they die but do not trouble themselves to do so while salvation is within their reach. They do not feel the urgency.

Solomon gave good advice when he said, "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest" (Proverbs 6:6-8). These little creatures, by instinct, gather food while it is available, so that they will have enough to eat in winter, when no food can be found. In these verses from the Bible, God is telling us to imitate the ants by making good use of our present opportunity – before it slips away for ever. Let us seek salvation through Jesus Christ while God still calls us to trust in Him. He says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ". May we do so before it is too late.

If you are still unconverted, ask God to make you feel the urgency of your situation as a sinner. Ask Him for grace to prepare to meet Him, for grace to set the affairs of your soul in order, and to do so without delay. Ask Him, not only to forgive all your sins, but to make you holy, so that you will be fit to enter the presence of the holy God in heaven. And if you have been converted, ask God to help you make full use of your opportunities to grow in grace and in the knowledge of your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The Covenanters: What They Teach Us

4. What They Suffered

Rev Caleb Hembd

Another section of a paper given at a New Zealand Youth Conference. Last month's section spoke about the persecution that the Covenanters suffered.

One of the first Covenanters to be martyred was the Marquis of Argyle, a powerful nobleman in Scotland. He was timid and indecisive by nature, which made his courageous speech before his execution all the more remarkable. On the scaffold in the year 1661, he set forth the dilemma that all Christians in Scotland would have to face – a dilemma that we all must face to some extent:

“These times are like to be either very sinning or suffering times; and let all Christians make their choice. There is a sad dilemma in the business, *sin* or *suffer*; and surely he that will choose the better part will choose to suffer. Others that will choose to sin will not escape suffering; they shall suffer, but perhaps not as I do, but worse. Mine is but temporal, theirs shall be eternal. When I shall be singing, they shall be howling.”

Just before his execution, his doctor took his pulse and found that it was beating at a normal rate. The Marquis of Argyle then “knelt down cheerfully”, lifted his hand to signal that he was ready, and the blade of the axe fell on his neck, killing him at once.

Another brave Covenanter was a 26-year-old minister named Hugh M’Kail. He was arrested for being involved in the Pentland Rising – a battle between 900 Covenanters and thousands of government soldiers. Even though he never actually fought in the battle, he was still arrested, tortured and sentenced to die.

Yet his final days were full of joy. “How good news it is,” he said to a friend, “to be within four days journey of enjoying the sight of Jesus Christ.” He was cheerful to the very end. People would ask how his leg, shattered by torture, was doing. “The fear of my neck makes me forget my leg,” he would reply. On the morning of his execution he arose early in the prison, and awoke a friend who would be martyred with him. “Up, John!” he said cheerfully, “You and I look not like men going to be hanged, seeing we lie so long.”

Reaching the ladder that went up to the platform of the gallows, he said, “I care no more to go up this ladder than if I were going to my father’s house”. He then said to those who would be martyred with him: “Friends, be not afraid, every step in this ladder is a degree nearer to heaven”.

His final words left an unforgettable impression on the huge crowd that had gathered to watch: "And now I leave off to speak any more to creatures, and begin my [fellowship] with God, which shall never be broken off. Farewell, father and mother, friends and relations; farewell, the world and all delights; farewell, meat and drink; farewell, sun, moon and stars. Welcome God and Father; welcome sweet Jesus Christ, the Mediator of the new covenant; welcome blessed Spirit of grace, the God of all consolation. Welcome glory; welcome eternal life; welcome death."

The Covenanters were godly; they were brave; but they were still human. We see all these qualities in the story of John Brown and his wife, who lived in Priesthill. They had only been married for three years when a band of soldiers suddenly appeared at their house. They suspected him of being a rebel against the King and, without any trial, told him to prepare for death. He then prayed, kissed his wife and children and told the officer he was ready. The officer shot him at close range, and then cruelly asked his wife, "What thinkest thou of thy husband now, woman?"

"I ever thought much good of him", replied the grieving widow, "and *now* more than ever." After the soldiers left, she set the children on the ground, gathered up his remains, covered them with a cloth, sat down and wept.

Not all stories of the Covenanters end tragically. Alexander Peden was a famous minister whose life was full of hairbreadth escapes. One time the soldiers were pursuing him swiftly, when he stopped, exhausted, and said, "Let us pray here, for if the Lord hear not our prayers and save us, we are all dead men".

Then he prayed, saying, "Lord, it is Thy enemy's day, hour and power; they may not be idle. But hast Thou no other work for them, but to send them after us? Send them after them to whom Thou wilt give strength to flee, for our strength is gone. Twine them about the hill, Lord, and cast the lap of Thy cloak over Old Sandy and thir poor things [that is, "Protect me and those with me] and save us this one time, and we'll keep it in remembrance and tell it to the commendation of Thy goodness, pity and compassion, what Thou didst for us at such a time."

Right after this prayer, a mist came down on them and the soldiers were forced to give up their pursuit. Much to their frustration, the government never succeeded in capturing him.

Then there were Covenanters who found clever ways to avoid their persecutors. A girl was walking to a conventicle, when soldiers suddenly appeared and asked her where she was going. "My elder brother has died," she replied, and I am going to hear the will read." She meant that Christ, the elder brother of His people, had obtained blessings for sinners through His

death in their place, and that she was going to hear a sermon about these blessings. But the soldiers did not understand what she meant; so they let her go.

Elsewhere, a curate discovered that the people were finding many ways to avoid attending his church – in spite of a law requiring all the locals to attend. (The curates were the ministers that replaced the Covenanting ministers who were forced to leave their congregations after Charles II became king.) He was furious and announced that, if they did not attend the next Sabbath, he would report them to the authorities. The women dutifully obeyed but made sure to bring an infant child with them. When the curate stood up to preach, all the babies began to wail, drowning out his voice. He lost his temper and swore at them, but they told him it was all his fault – they could not leave their infants at home.

As persecution continued, some Covenanters became even more determined to resist Charles II. Some of them openly refused to accept his authority and declared war against him. They asserted that not only had he completely violated the covenant he had signed at his coronation, but he had also become a tyrant who cruelly persecuted his law-abiding subjects. These actions, they reasoned, meant that he no longer had any right to the throne and he was no longer worthy of their loyalty.

This explains why a few Covenanters refused to take an oath that they would never resist him, or even say, “God save the King”. For them, to repeat this common phrase was to express a prayerful desire that God would preserve a persecutor who had broken his covenant vows to God and the people. They felt they would be praying that God would preserve a man who was fighting directly against the King of the Church. Many Christians in Scotland felt these few Covenanters were acting very foolishly and putting the Government against the more moderate Covenanters. The Government, unsurprisingly, claimed they were fanatics and deserved instant execution.

The ministers of these stricter Covenanters found themselves in an impossible dilemma. If they applied biblical principles only to the larger issues of the day, their consciences would accuse them of being *unfaithful*. But if they applied Biblical principles to every issue – however small – many would accuse them of being *fanatics*.

The world often tries to force principled Christians into this dilemma. If Christians apply their principles inconsistently, the world calls them hypocrites. But if they apply them consistently, the world calls them fanatics. For example, during a time of persecution against the ancient Church, Christians would refuse to offer incense to the Emperor. Their Roman persecutors would then tell them, “If you drop a single grain of incense on

the altar to our emperor, your life will be spared”. When they refused, the Roman authorities declared that they were extremists and worthy of death.

Yet Christ declares, “Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness’ sake” (Matthew 5:10). They are blessed in their life, blessed in their death, and blessed throughout eternity. Even their memory is blessed. So it was with the Covenanters. They were not perfect, and we could probably find instances when they acted unwisely. But they chose to suffer for the righteous principle, that only Christ may rule His church, and no one can deny that their witness was much blessed. The Covenanting ministers not only saw many souls converted under their preaching, but they also enjoyed remarkable peace and comfort as they faced martyrdom. And the day was rapidly approaching when Christ Himself would vindicate their stand.

“Yea, Hath God Said?”

Rev K M Watkins

Last month we saw how most modern English translations of the Bible **L**miss out verses and words which we have in our faithful Authorised Version (AV). Modern versions may seem easier to read, but surely we do not want to use Bibles that do not contain the whole word of God!

Remember how Satan sowed doubt in Eve’s mind about God’s word, saying, “Yea, hath God said?” (Genesis 3:1). Later he directly contradicted God by saying, “Ye shall not surely die” (verse 4), but the temptation began by questioning what God had really said. Modern Bible translations do that too. Not only do they exclude many words that God has spoken, they also question some of the words that they do include. By making these words appear doubtful, the question is raised if they really are the word of God or not. These versions give with one hand – by including the words. But they take away with the other hand – by displaying the words differently to the rest of the Bible or by inserting a note that casts doubt on their reliability.

Two important New Testament passages, each 12 verses long, are included in modern translations, but their appearance is different to the rest of the text, marked off between square brackets or put in italics. Notes are added which suggest that these passages are not the true word of God. Did God really put them in the Bible? Doubt and confusion are sown, and these passages are made to look unreliable. “Yea, hath God said?”

The first passage is at the end of Mark’s Gospel. Mark 16:9-20 is a precious part of Scripture, recording resurrection appearances of Christ and the commission He gave the apostles: “Go ye into all the world, and preach

the gospel to every creature” (verse 15). The consequences of faith and unbelief are set out: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (verse 16). Then follows the Saviour’s ascension into heaven and blessing the apostles’ labours: “And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following” (verse 20).

There is nothing here that believing souls would want to have jostled out of their hands. But modern versions of the Bible do exactly that. The English Standard Version (ESV) has become increasingly popular, which is surprising given that it is based on the Revised Standard Version (RSV), a notoriously unfaithful translation first published in 1952. From December 2020 the ESV became the standard translation for *The Banner of Truth* magazine. The ESV puts Mark 16:9-20 in double square brackets, with a note suggesting no fewer than four different ways in which Mark’s Gospel might have ended, including the idea that these 12 verses are not God’s word at all!

One edition of the New American Standard Bible (NASB) says, “Some of the oldest mss [manuscripts] do not contain [verses] 9-20”, thus implying (falsely) that the oldest Greek manuscripts must be the best, and therefore this passage should not be trusted. It suggests alternative endings. Other NASB editions say, “Later mss add [verses] 9-20”, implying that this passage is an uninspired addition to God’s word.

The New International Version (NIV) separates these verses from the rest, and in some editions prints them in italics. One edition notes: “The two most reliable early manuscripts do not have Mark 16:9-20”. Another edition says, “The earliest manuscripts and some other ancient witnesses do not have verses 9-20”, implying (falsely) that the earlier a Greek manuscript is, the more reliable it is, and therefore these verses should not be treated as the word of God. The NIV also suggests a much shorter ending to Mark’s Gospel. Readers cannot know from the NIV what is and what is not God’s word, but they are certainly encouraged to suspect that Mark 16:9-20 is not God’s word.

The second passage is John 7:53-8:11, containing the account of the woman caught in adultery – a gospel lifeline to many. The passage shows us what happens when sinners are converted and effectually called to salvation. The woman was caught “in the very act” of sin. That is how sinners feel when the Holy Spirit convicts them – all the evidence of their guilt is set before them. There was no question that the woman deserved to be stoned to death according to the law. That is how sinners feel when the Holy Spirit shows them the punishment they deserve. Like the woman, they feel surrounded by accusing witnesses on every side.

But then, like the adulteress, sinners are brought into the presence of Jesus, who knows all about their sin. They accept that He has every right to cast the first stone of condemnation against them. But instead of condemning them, the Saviour does what He did to the woman, and issues them with a full pardon for sin, “Neither do I condemn thee”. What kindness and love! How many souls have laid hold on those precious words for their pardon! Enjoying such grace, sinners are ready to receive the Saviour’s direction for the rest of their lives: “Go, and sin no more”.

No one should want to lose this from their Bibles! It guides sinners to Jesus for salvation and forgiveness. It refreshes believers in the grace of Christ and motivates them in His service. Those are not things the devil wants, so he uses these modern translations to undermine confidence in this passage, questioning whether the event ever happened.

The ESV prints the passage in square brackets, implying that it cannot be relied on as God’s real word, with this note: “Some manuscripts do not include 7:53-8:11; others add the passage here or after 7:36 or after 21:25 or after Luke 21:38, with variations in the text”. The reader is liable to be left in confusion. Is this the word of God or not?

One edition of the NASB notes: “John 7:53-8:11 is not found in most of the old mss”, again implying that if older Greek manuscripts do not have this passage, then it is not really the word of God. Another edition says: “Later mss add the story of the adulterous woman”. The word “story” suggests that it may not be real “history”. How can sinners using the NASB rely on words that might not even have been said? The devil knows what he is doing with these modern translations. He did the same with Eve when he said, “Yea, hath God said?”

The NIV displays this passage separately and notes: “The earliest manuscripts and many other ancient witnesses do not have John 7:53-8:11”. These unnecessary, negative comments convey the impression that this passage cannot be part of Scripture, not only because it is absent from the “earliest” Greek manuscripts, but also because it does not appear in many other old writings. If sinners cannot be sure that Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn thee”, how can they rely on these words?

What about the New King James Version (NKJV)? Unlike other modern versions, it claims to be based on the same true and faithful Greek text as the AV. The NKJV does not make the two passages look different from the rest of the Bible. Yet it does add notes which seriously question whether they are really part of God’s word. The devil’s voice can be discerned here too, saying, “Yea, hath God said?”

The NKJV says that the verses of Mark 16:9-20 “are bracketed in NU as

not in the original text. They are lacking in Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus, although nearly all other mss of Mark contain them.” (*NU* refers to a modern edition of the Greek New Testament produced on unsound principles, and the two *Codex* references are to old Greek manuscripts notorious for many errors.) What could be achieved by pitting these three unreliable documents against “nearly all other manuscripts”, apart from raising doubt as to whether these verses are part of the “original” inspired word of God?

Regarding the John passage, the NKJV again refers to the *NU* edition of the Greek text, saying that it “brackets 7:53 through 8:11 as not in the original text”. It admits that “they are present in over 900 mss of John”, but the seeds of doubt have already been sown.

It is the devil who says, “Yea, hath God said?” The Holy Spirit did not inspire Scripture to leave us a Bible that we could not be sure of. When “holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Peter 1:21), the result was “a more sure word of prophecy” (verse 19). “The testimony of the Lord is sure” (Psalm 19:7), even “very sure” (Psalm 93:5) – not doubtful and uncertain. The inspired word of God is not like these modern translations, which convey the impression that we cannot be certain about what God has said. Rather, as we have in the AV, the word of God is firm and steadfast, a fixed and immovable anchor for our souls.

Assurance of Being Saved

2. Is It Possible?

Rev George Macdonald

This is a further section of a paper given at a Youth Conference in Australia. Last month's article addressed the first two points in the paper: (1.) Sinners must be saved; (2.) The message of the gospel.

3. **Is assurance of personal salvation possible in this life?** Well might we ask this question: Is it possible in this world of sin and death to get such assurance? The heart of man is described in these terms: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). So that is true of your heart and mine. How easy it is to be deceived!

God's people are not sinless; so is it possible to be assured that God loves us? We are assured of our sin (painfully so) but can we be assured of God's love to us and of our salvation? Many people have been greatly troubled as to whether they can ever be assured of their salvation.

Clearly, whatever the difficulties, the Bible does hold out the hope that a sinner may be assured of his or her salvation. Paul writes to believers in Ephesus and calls them saints. He goes on to assure them of what he wishes for them: “Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 1:2).

And Peter writes to: “the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,” who were “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied” (1 Peter 1:1,2). Clearly, the inspired Apostles believed that sinners could be assured of their salvation. If we believe in the inspiration of Scripture, then we cannot say that Peter and Paul somehow erred in writing as they did or that they went too far.

In *The Shorter Catechism* we read: “The benefits which in this life do accompany or flow from justification, adoption, and sanctification, are, *assurance of God’s love*, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, increase of grace, and perseverance therein to the end” (Answer 36). The love in the first benefit listed is God’s saving love. While He may have a general regard to all men as created in His image, His special love flows out to His people – sinners saved in Christ with an everlasting salvation.

When we look at God’s Word, we see that assurance of the love of God is indeed possible, even in this life. We mentioned at the beginning of this paper that, at the end of his life, the Apostle Paul could say, “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day”. This, remember, was from a man who had once persecuted the Church of God.

David also, when coming to the end of his life, could say, “Although my house be not so with God; yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although He make it not to grow.” Is not this the language of assurance?

Thus the Bible confirms that assurance is possible. If assurance of salvation was possible to Paul and David, as sinners saved by grace, it is possible to us, if we have the same hope that we are reconciled to God as they were – by the death of His Son. Paul also writes, “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree” (Galatians 3:13).

The biographies of prominent Christians give us an insight into some of their experiences. Often we find missionaries in the harshest of surroundings filled with a sure sense of God’s love. Usually missionaries are assured of salvation; they cannot keep that assured hope to themselves but desire to

spread the good news of the gospel – what gives them hope wherever they are. The mission spirit is perhaps best exemplified in the words of the woman of Samaria: “Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?” (John 4:29).

Men like Adoniram Judson of Burma and Robert Moffat of southern Africa endured much hardship for the sake of the kingdom of God. What enabled them to continue with such determination to bear the burden and heat of the mission field? They were assured of the importance of the gospel, not only to themselves as saved sinners, but also to others who were in need of a Saviour.

The well-known missionary to India, Henry Martyn, was one who suffered much in his efforts to further the cause of Christ. The biographer Jim Cromarty comments on Martyn’s experience when aboard the ship *Union* sailing to India: “When dysentery broke out on board, Henry felt so ill that his thoughts turned to death and the glory of heaven. He went on to write, ‘I had so much delight and joy in the consideration of heaven, and my assured title to it, that I felt far more desirous of dying than living’.”

Such a man was well fitted to endure much hardship for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Men like him could say with Paul, who wrote to believers in Thessalonica: “Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake” (1 Thessalonians 1:5).

Ten Pounds for Ten Verses

On one occasion I was making a journey by ship. When I was going downstairs for the night, I noticed a number of people in the saloon. Going nearer, I found two men arguing on the subject of Christianity. One was a confessed unbeliever, a man about 40; the other an old Christian of about 70.

It was soon evident that the Christian was no match for the unbeliever, a man of a ready tongue, who was trying to hold up the Christian and Christianity to ridicule amidst the laughter of those gathered round. I was anxiously waiting for an opportunity to join in the discussion, but to my disappointment the argument stopped. The old man retired defeated.

After a moment’s pause, I said to the Christian, “I am sorry you stopped”.

He replied, “I have nothing more to say”.

The younger man took up these words, trying to make it appear that the old man had no case and ranted on to us for a further five minutes, in which he did not spare my old friend. My appearance and manner evidently took

the speaker off his guard when I said, "It seems that you know quite a bit about the Bible".

He replied, "I should think I do. I have read it through again and again."

"Well, that is what people who heard you talking would think, and I suppose it is because you know the Bible so thoroughly that you condemn it so confidently and severely."

"Yes", he replied, "that is so. It is because I know it so thoroughly that I condemn it as I do".

I pulled out my wallet and took out two notes and held them up for all to see. Then I said to the speaker, "There is £10 for you if you will just quote 10 verses of the Bible correctly".

This gave quite a new turn to the conversation; the company waited expectantly to hear him make a start. But instead he fought shy of my offer by saying, "It is a long time since I read the book. I haven't read the Bible since I went to sea some 15 years ago, and my memory is failing."

I urged that someone who knew the Bible so thoroughly, as he professed to do, could surely repeat 10 verses out of the 31 173 it contained, especially when he was going to get £10 for it.

How my Sabbath School class would have jumped at the offer! But this foolish fellow once again pleaded the length of time since he had read it and his failing memory. Here the company began to laugh at his plight after all his boasting.

I came down to seven verses, then to five and, as he declined to make a start I renewed my offer to three verses. He then tried to repeat a single verse but misquoted the words. I took out my Bible, let him see his mistake and then got others to read the verse.

I then said, "Ladies and gentlemen, here is a sample of the men who condemn the Bible and oppose Christianity, who tell you they know the Bible from beginning to end and yet, when £10 is offered them, cannot quote one verse correctly".

Then I talked to the little group for about 20 minutes and then prayed. Later I had a private and serious talk with the speaker and one of his companions, warning them both of their danger.

In the morning both he and his friend came to my berth. They told me they had not been able to sleep, thinking all night of what I had said. They thanked me most sincerely and declared that, from then on, they would be different men. Many scoffers boast of their knowledge of the Bible, but with them you may safely risk your £10 on the same conditions as I did. The only people who oppose the Bible are those whose life it condemns, who know neither the book nor its Author.

Adapted from *Cheering Words*

Paid to Go to Church

A minister in Wales heard that someone who lived near him was going about his ordinary work on Sabbaths. The minister went to speak to him and asked him why he was breaking the Sabbath.

The man answered that he was finding it difficult to earn enough money to support his family when he worked for just six days in a week.

The minister asked him: would he come to church if he (the minister) would pay him a day's wages?

"Yes, most gladly," the poor man told him. He came to church regularly and the minister paid him as he had promised.

After some time, the minister forgot to send the money. When he remembered, he went to speak to the poor man. He said, "I am in your debt".

"No," the man replied, "you are not."

"How so?" asked the minister, "I have not paid you lately."

"True," said the poor man, "but I can now trust God, for I have found that He can bless the work of the six days for the support of my family, just the same as seven."

It was said that, ever afterwards, "he strictly kept the Sabbath and found that, in keeping God's commands, there is not only no loss, but great reward". God is still the same; He is able to bless those who keep His commands, even when things are difficult. Yet we should seek more than outward obedience, and I hope God saved the man from all his sins.

We should also seek a new heart from God. We should ask Him to work in us according to what He has said: "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put My spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgements, and do them" (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

For Junior Readers

"Behold the Lamb of God"

I am sure you have heard of the famous London preacher, Charles H Spurgeon. He was converted as a teenager listening to a sermon on the text, "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth". At the age of 19 he became a minister and quickly became well known for his powerful preaching.

A few years later, in 1857, he was asked to preach at a special service of

prayer and humiliation. It was being held because of the uprising in India in which thousands of Indians and British soldiers were killed. The service was to be held in the Crystal Palace, a huge building made of iron and glass. It was three times the size of St Paul's Cathedral. That day he faced the largest congregation to which he ever preached in any building, over 23 000 people! Can you even imagine so many people gathered in one place to pray and to hear the Word of God?

Before the day arrived, he was asked to go to the Crystal Palace and decide where the best position to place the pulpit would be, and also to test how well his voice would carry in the vast space. In order to do this he cried out in a very loud voice: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world".

Totally unknown to him, there was a workman in one of the galleries attending to some work. He knew nothing about the minister or what was happening down below. Suddenly he heard these precious words, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world". They came like a message from heaven to his soul.

He was convinced of his sin, put down his tools and went home. The Holy Spirit came to him with the words he had heard. And after a time of seeking and spiritual struggling, the man found peace and life for his soul by looking to the Lamb of God as his Saviour. Was that not wonderful?

What about you? I am sure you have often read that verse – perhaps heard sermons preached on it. But have you ever prayed that God would open your eyes spiritually to see Christ as the Lamb of God, who can take away your sin? If not, should you not do so now? And do not rest until you are made able to do so, just as that workman was.

J van Kralingen

For Younger Readers

A Bad Builder

The young woman was godly. She worked well and honestly for a family. They thought well of her. Then she married. But her husband did not work honestly. He often got drunk. She had to earn money to pay the bills.

The man she used to work for decided to have a house built for her, and paid her husband to do the building work. The man did not tell the husband who the house was for, and then he went away for some months. But the builder did not work hard; nor did he make a good job. When the man came home, the builder told him that the house was finished and said, "There is not a better house in that district than that house of yours". It was a lie.

The kind man gave the house to the woman and she and her husband moved in. How often the builder wished he had known he was building a house for himself. Then he would have done better work. We should always try to do our work well. We should remember that God sees all that we do.

A Powerful Saviour

Robert M M'Cheyne

M'Cheyne was a godly minister in Dundee This is a letter written in September 1842 to someone who "had begun to see Christ". It has been edited.

Why did you not write me a few lines? It would keep you occupied, and your soul might find rest even when pouring itself out to another person. I do trust you are seeking hard after Him whom your soul loves. He is not far from any one of us. He is a powerful and precious Saviour, and happy are they who put their trust in Him.

He is the Rose of Sharon, lovely to look upon, having all divine and human excellences meeting in Himself, and yet He is the Lily of the Valley – meek and lowly in heart, willing to save the vilest. He answers the need of your soul. You are all guilt; He is a fountain to wash you. You are all naked; He has a wedding garment to cover you. You are dead; He is the life. You are all wounds and bruises; He is the Balm of Gilead. His righteousness is broader than your sin; and then He is so free.

Remember the words we read at the well: "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely". Look at Isaiah 40:1,2: "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people . . ." If you receive Christ as your Surety, you have received double punishment for all your sins. The sufferings of Christ for us were as honouring to God as if we had suffered eternal punishment three times over. If you will only open your arms to receive Christ as your Surety, then your iniquity is pardoned. You will taste immediate forgiveness. Your warfare with the law and an accusing conscience will be immediately accomplished.

If you will only lay hold on Christ now, you will feel the force of that sweet command, "Comfort ye, comfort ye" – double comfort, double peace, for in Jesus you have suffered double wrath. Pray over that verse and may He who first made the light to shine out of darkness shine into your heart, to let you see the way of salvation clearly. Soon may you sing: "Thou wast angry with me; but Thine anger is turned away, and Thou comfortedst me". "O to grace how great a debtor!"

You are always in my prayers, seeking that God would reveal Himself to you. O the joy of being able to say, "My Beloved is mine, and I am His"!

Looking Around Us

Services in the Forest

The small town of Innerleithen lies between Peebles and Galashiels in the Scottish Borders. A new minister was called this year to the Church of Scotland there, though the parish also includes the nearby villages of Traquair and Walkerburn.

He was keen to begin outdoor services in a forest, in the hope that they will help people to connect with the “outside beauty”. He said, “I’m keen to see ways that people can connect the wonder and beauty that we all see in creation with the God who made it all”. The beauty of God’s creation is indeed wonderful. It did not come about through evolution, a series of random events with no one in control. It came about through God Himself acting to create everything. If we look at a tree in a forest, for example, we should remember that the all-wise God designed it to be beautiful.

When we look at creation, we can learn that there is a God, a God of great power. But we must go to the Bible to learn what is most important about Him. We need to learn that He is holy; we cannot learn that from nature. The Bible teaches us that we are sinners and that sin is offensive to God. Sin is doing wrong against God, and God – being a just God – must punish sin.

Creation is wonderful and beautiful in very many ways, but far more wonderful and beautiful is the grace of God revealed in the Bible, for He is able and willing to deliver sinners from the consequences of their sin. “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). This is what should be at the centre of the preaching that God commands.

Of course, there is absolutely nothing wrong with worshipping God outside. Over 300 years ago, Covenanters had to worship God on remote moorlands if they were to worship Him at all, and God blessed the preached Word to many souls. Even within the last 100 years, when congregations were usually larger than today and more people gathered for communion services than now, Sabbath services were often conducted outside. Many people got good for their souls, both converted and unconverted.

The important point is that God’s children, when worshipping outside, were not seeking to connect with natural beauty. They wanted to learn more, from the Scriptures, about God and the salvation that He has provided; they were seeking to worship Him. And very often there were others who had begun to realise that they were sinners and were seeking Christ as the Saviour whom God has appointed; they were learning that God is to be found in the revelation He has given – in the Bible. May we learn this too!

Children Called to Christ

Like mist on the mountain,
Like ships on the sea,
So swiftly the years
Of our pilgrimage flee;
In the grave of our fathers
How soon we shall lie!
Dear children, today
To a Saviour fly.

How sweet are the flowerets
In April and May!
But often the frost makes
Them wither away.
Like flowers you may fade:
Are you ready to die?
While “yet there is room”,
To a Saviour fly.

When Samuel was young,
He first knew the Lord,
He slept in His smile
And rejoiced in His word:
So most of God’s children
Are early brought nigh:
O seek Him in youth;
To a Saviour fly.

Do you ask me for pleasure?
Then lean on His breast,
For there the sin-laden
And weary find rest.
In the valley of death,
You will triumphing cry,
“If this be called dying,
'Tis pleasant to die”.

R M M'Cheyne

Price £1.00