

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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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.

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Volume 86

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Ready for the End of the Journey?

Once more the end of a year is approaching, another milestone on the journey through life towards eternity. How many more such milestones lie ahead of us? We cannot tell. But we usually assume far too easily that there are many more years before us. We are far too ready to tell ourselves that we will live for a long time yet.

The Bible tells us that “it is appointed unto men once to die” (Hebrews 9:27). It is God who has made the appointment, but He has not told us when that appointment will take place; so we do not know when we will die and pass into eternity, to meet our Maker. One vital matter that follows is that we must be ready, whenever death will come. It could be very unexpected.

Jesus warned, “Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh” (Matthew 24:44). This verse applies to the second coming of Christ, at the end of the world; but the same principle applies to the need to be ready to leave the world by death, at whatever time God has appointed for you. You must seek to be ready *now*; you must not put off seeking the Lord till some indefinite time in the future. If you go on, year after year, putting off seeking salvation – even one day at a time – it is very likely that you will never seek the Lord, no matter how long your life may go on. So listen to what God is saying: “Behold, *now* is the accepted time; behold, *now* is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2).

But death is not the end, as so many think today. At least, that is what they would like to believe. The first verse quoted in this article goes on: “after this the judgement”. “For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:10). God has appointed that appearance for us all.

We are sinners, and God is righteous. And He will show that He is dealing righteously with everyone. We must all go to judgement, “that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad”. Christ on the judgement seat will show that all who have believed in Him have been justly brought to heaven and will be there for ever. He died to save them; they believed in Him and they did good works while they were still in the body, which showed that they were godly. On the

other hand, it will be shown just as clearly that those who did not believe in Christ never did any good works; everything that they ever did, right to the end of their lives, was sinful.

God understands everything about us all; He knows all that everyone does, says and thinks. J C Ryle wrote, "God is everywhere. There is no place in heaven or earth where He is not. There is no place in air or land or sea, no place above ground or under ground, no place in town or country, no place in Europe, Asia, Africa, or America where God is not always present.

"Enter into your [room] and lock the door; God is there. Climb to the top of the highest mountain, where not even an insect moves; God is there. Sail to the most remote island in the Pacific Ocean . . . God is there. He is always near us – seeing, hearing, observing, knowing every action and deed and word and whisper and look and thought and motive and secret of every one of us, and everywhere." Among the verses from the Bible that Ryle quoted to support what he said was Proverbs 15:3: "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good". God sees everything, whether it is right or wrong, wherever you are.

Ryle goes on: "One half [of] the sin committed by mankind arises from wrong views of their Maker and Judge. Men are reckless and wicked, because they do not think that God sees them. They do things they would never do if they really believed that they were under the eyes of the Almighty.

"What is your God like?" said a sneering infidel [an infidel is someone who does not believe the Bible] one day to a poor Christian. 'What is this God of yours like, this God about whom you make such [a fuss]? Is He great or is He small?'

"My God", was the reply, 'is a great and a small God at the same time: so great that the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him, and yet so small that He can dwell in the heart of a poor sinner like me.'

"Where is your God, my boy?" said another infidel to a child whom he saw coming out of a school where the Bible was taught. 'Where is your God about whom you have been reading? Show Him to me, and I will give you an orange.'

"Show me where He is not," was the answer, 'and I will give you two. My God is everywhere.'

"However hard to understand this doctrine may be, it is one which is most useful . . . for our souls. To keep continually in mind that God is always present with us, to live always as in God's sight, to act and speak and think as under His eye – all this [very much tends] to have a good effect upon our souls. Wide and deep and searching and piercing is the influence of that one thought, 'Thou God seest me'."

When we hear or read or think that God is everywhere and sees everything that happens, we need to be practical about it. It is not just a fact that we should know, it is something that should influence how we behave. We need to say, God sees *me* – not only other people. He sees everything that *I* do; He knows everything that *I* say; He understands everything that is going on in *my* mind. And He will bring *me* to judgement.

So, to go back to the word Jesus used, we need to be *ready* – ready to die, ready to appear in judgement before Him who knows and understands everything about us. And we need to be ready *now*, before more time passes, before we pass another milestone on the way to eternity. Not that we can promise ourselves that we will even see the end of this year; we need to seek the Lord now, who has promised, “Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37). Christ has never turned away anyone who came to Him – who believed on Him – and He never will.

Trust in Him as the One who suffered and died for sinners, to bear away their sins, to endure the punishment due to them for their sins. Trust in Him as the One who is calling you to come to Him. He tells you: “Come unto Me” (Matthew 11:28). You can be sure that, if you do come – if you do believe – He will most certainly *not* turn you away. All will be well when you die; all will be well when you appear before the judgement seat of Christ.

Think of the responsibility that lies on you: to seek the Lord now. Ask Him to make you practical about these things. Ask Him to bring you to say sincerely before Him: *I* must seek God now; make *me* ready to die and go to judgement.

The Blind Dog

Rev K M Watkins

The dog was three years old and completely blind from birth. He was found wandering the streets of Bosnia, in Eastern Europe, and ended up in the government dog pound. A rescue charity brought him over to Scotland. We, his new owners, picked him up from east of Inverness. On the drive home, we stopped near Cluanie, to give him a walk. We put the lead on him, and off he went! It was amazing to see him walking several steps ahead of us, always keeping straight to the path going up towards the mountains, without any direction from us. If the path turned, he turned too. If there was a bush or anything else obstructing the way, he walked around it and continued his forward walk. Was he really blind? It was as if he could see!

The day was quite warm, so we took him off the path to get a drink at a

little stream. Having quenched his thirst, he turned around, and immediately everything changed. Suddenly he was gripped with fear, locking his legs, and then lying down and refusing to move. He had lost his bearings and did not know where he was. Now it was obvious that he was indeed blind. We had to drag him back to the path. As soon as he was there, all was back to normal and off he trotted, as before.

We realised that the dog was following the scent left by the many dogs which had walked the path before him. That is how he could do so well, even though he could not see. But when he was off the path, the scent was gone, and so was his guidance. Then he was alone, in total darkness, afraid to move in case he would walk into something.

This is like the Lord's people. They can feel they have little understanding and wisdom. They can feel as if they are blind, groping for the right way forward. But when they know that they are on the path taken by the children of God before them, they feel safe. They find it easier to avoid obstacles and temptations in their way, encouraged and guided by the saints of the past. This is to "go [their] way forth in the footsteps of the flock" (Song of Solomon 1:8). How comfortable they are then! They are in the right way, for this is the way the Lord led His people in the past. They love to trace the steps of the godly – there is safety in that.

The Apostle Paul told the Corinthians, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). He was telling them to take him as their example, just as he was taking Christ for his example. As far as Paul was following Christ, seeking to live as He lived and walk as He walked, they would find safety in living and walking like Paul.

Again, Paul told the Hebrews, "Be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Hebrews 6:12). The godly go to heaven when they die – they "inherit the promises" of eternal life and all the blessings of glory. What path did they take to get there? The path of "faith and patience". What were the Hebrews to do then, if they wanted to reach heaven? They were to walk on the same path. Walking in faith, they would find themselves in fellowship with the saints who walked in faith before they did. Keeping constantly to the Christian course of patience, not giving up on the Lord and His gospel, they would be doing as the saints had done before them. That was the safe way to live – that was the path on which they could make progress.

Through Jeremiah, the Lord calls these the "old paths" and "the good way": "Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls" (Jeremiah 6:16). Isaiah calls it "the way of holiness" (Isaiah 35:8). It is like

a “highway”, for the Lord’s people travel along it as “wayfaring men”. This is where they are safe, for “no lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there” (verse 9).

To modern “Christians”, the holy ways in which the Lord’s people used to go are old-fashioned and too strict. They are sure that they know better than those who went before them. They are all for new ways. That usually means ways where holiness is diluted, ways where spiritual tenderness is unknown, ways where godly fear is despised, ways where reverence in worship is absent, and ways where so much compromise is made with the world that one can hardly see a difference between the world and the “Church”.

The gracious work of the Holy Spirit in true Christians does not leave them like that. When they meet these modern ways, they can feel like the dog when he was down by the stream and away from the path. They do not feel safe there. They cannot be at home there. It is like darkness to them. They are afraid of it. They cannot find peace for their souls there.

When the Lord’s people find that they have strayed from the path usually followed by the godly, it frightens them and they seem to freeze. They know they should not be there. They should not be in that place – it is not the kind of place the Lord’s people used to go to. They should not be making such close friendships with worldly people – those are not the companions the Lord’s people used to choose. They should not be engaged in that activity – it is not something God’s people usually did in the past. They hear the Lord questioning them as He questioned the prophet when he fled to the cave: “What doest thou here, Elijah?” (1 Kings 19:9).

Getting back to the right path is all they want. They pray, “Show me Thy ways, O Lord; teach me Thy paths. Lead me in Thy truth, and teach me” (Psalm 25:4,5). They cry, “O that my ways were directed to keep Thy statutes [again]!” (Psalm 119:5). They search the Scriptures to see what God’s people did in their situation, and thus they learn more of “walking in truth” (2 John 4). They read the stories and diaries of the godly of the past, to gain insight into what they themselves ought to do. Perhaps they know older Christians that they can go to and seek their advice. Just spending time with these “fathers” and “mothers” in the faith can help them back to the right path. Above all, they attend the public means of grace. There, in the solemn assemblies of God’s people, they are warmed by the praise, helped by the prayers and moved by the preaching. There they find the sweet savour of God’s grace in Christ. This gets them back on the right track.

These are “the footsteps of the flock”. Through them, the Lord keeps His

promise: "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them" (Isaiah 42:16).

Satan's Snare

Richard Knill became a well-known minister in the 1800s. While he was studying for the ministry, he was on the Isle of Wight and visited a family who lived there. The father of the family was walking up and down the room, wringing his hands and crying. He was saying about his little child: "She will die. God is punishing me for my sins." The mother sat silently holding the little girl on her lap.

Knill began to encourage the father to think that God would hear their prayers and spare the girl. Knill then gave him good advice as to how he should train up his child for God. "Especially," he said, "let us hear your voice in prayer".

"Stop, stop," the man answered, "you do not know who I am."

"No, but I should be happy to learn."

"We were both members of a church at Ryde", the man said as he began to explain about himself and his wife. "I led the singing and conducted the prayer meetings." He added that his wife would never have married him if she did not think he was "a religious man" – by which he probably meant a converted man. They had a grocery business and they were making enough money to live comfortably. But they could see prospects of making more; so they took over another shop. "And", he confessed, "that was our snare." Probably they should have been more content with what they already had.

The father went on: "When we first came, we always closed our shop on Saturday night, not to open it again till Monday." But the shop next door did a lot of business on Sabbaths, especially if a ship came into the harbour and needed supplies. They might then make more money on the Lord's Day than on any other day of the week. The father confessed, "This was a great temptation to us to do the same; we tried it".

When they first opened the shop on a Sabbath they tried to finish selling goods and close the shop in time to go to church. Later they were so busy that they could only manage the evening service. The man confessed that their consciences became so hardened that they stopped going to church altogether. How easy it is to slip further and further into sin!

The father believed that God was going to take away their child to punish

them. Knill advised him to learn to be wiser through what was happening. He said, "Repent and do thy first works", using the Lord's words to the Church in Ephesus (Revelation 2:5). He advised the shopkeeper to call in his young men and have family worship with them.

"I cannot", was the answer.

"Cannot!" Knill exclaimed. "Why?"

"They know how I used to live."

"Well, if you were not ashamed to serve the devil in their presence, don't be ashamed to tell them you have changed masters. Tell them honestly the whole story." And he was to let them see his sincerity by the change in his behaviour. Knill prayed with the family and later he left the house.

A few days afterwards, Knill called again at the shop. He asked for the shopkeeper and was told: "He is upstairs".

He then asked about the little girl. A young woman working there told him: "She is recovering; she began to get better after you left".

Knill asked the young woman to call the shopkeeper. Probably by this time, Knill was in a back room. He looked around and noticed some Bibles on a table. When the young woman came back, he asked her about them. She told him that they were used for family worship. The shopkeeper had obviously taken Knill's advice.

Years later, some of Knill's family met the girl, now grown up. By this time her parents had died, but she wanted Knill to know that they had lived Christian lives and that she herself had been converted before they passed away. She added, "Your father's advice and prayers were not lost".

We may ask, Were the father and mother converted before they fell into the snare of Satan's temptation to break the Sabbath and gradually give up going to church? Perhaps we cannot give a definite answer. It would be safer for people who fall into serious sin – for instance, becoming careless about hearing the preaching of the Word of God – to assume that they are not converted. Then it should be very clear to them that they need to repent and look to Christ for forgiveness.

Even if people are converted and then backslide into serious sin, they need to repent. Indeed, all of God's children need to repent again and again; they need to be looking to Christ, trusting in Him, all the time. It is always dangerous to become careless about any practice that is part of true religion, like family worship, for example. Let us always remember how much we need God to make us truly His children. And, if He has done so, we need Him to keep us from sliding away in any degree.

Another point: the prayers of God's people are never lost. What a blessing to have God's people pray for us! But we must also pray for ourselves.

Are You Better?

Rev Alexander McPherson

Taken, with some editing, from *The Young People's Magazine* for December 1977.

You have entered the last month of the year, and I am going to ask you, Are you better? The question will probably puzzle you, short though it is; so I had better explain it. It does not mean, Are you feeling better? because I would only say that to someone whom I knew had been unwell. And I do not mean, Are you better behaved? although that could come into it. What I am asking is: Are you better at heart than previously? Has your nature improved?

Do you not think the question, Are You Better? quite appropriate in view of the fact that we are all sinful, and that nothing defiled shall pass through the gates of heaven? (See Revelation 21:27).

You may reply, Perhaps I am not the best person to ask about that. It might be better to ask my parents or others who know me.

No, it would not; others might be able to say whether you were better behaved or not, but that would not prove whether your nature was improved. Young people often become better-behaved as they grow older. They become more sensible and more responsible. They see that foolish pranks and thoughtless mischief are wrong and childish, and they cease from them. But to behave better in such ways does not mean that one is better at heart.

This is a question you yourself must settle. It actually concerns you and God, and what could be more private and personal? In fact you can only answer the question by the help of God's Word. Ask yourself first whether the Word of God speaks at all about people getting better naturally, and at length being ready to enter heaven. I trust you know your Bible well enough to say, No. One quotation should be enough: "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away" (Isaiah 64:6). No word about improvement in that description of everyone!

Now then, does Scripture say that if we try to make ourselves better, we may succeed? Again, No; "because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Romans 8:7). "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil" (Jeremiah 13:23).

So we now ask, Does the Bible speak of any way that someone can become better? The answer, you well know, is an emphatic Yes this time. Scripture speaks of a new birth by which a sinner becomes a new creature in Christ Jesus. And the many things it says on this subject leave us in no

doubt that a regenerate person is a better person than before the change took place. Peter, addressing Jews in Jerusalem, mentions, as an effect of Christ blessing sinners, that they are turned away from their iniquities (Acts 3:26). Is someone who is turning away from his sins not better than before he began to do so?

What cannot happen as a matter of course, or be produced by our own efforts, is done through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. The planting of a new nature (or heart) within a sinner results in many good effects, such as faith in Christ, repentance unto life, love, new obedience. In the sight of God grace makes a person better, and will continue to do so until at death his soul will be made perfect in holiness. The natural course is for a sinner to become worse, and for a saved sinner to become better.

I do not say that the saved sinner will feel better. As the work of grace goes on within, he will see more and more of his sinfulness, and grieve over it; but that is part of becoming better. In spite of his self-loathing, he will have to say like a minister of long ago: “I am not what I ought to be; I am not what I long to be; I am not what I shall be; but, praise God, I am not what I was.”

Now, once again, our question, Are you better? Has God’s grace made a change in your nature, so that you rely on Christ alone to save you, and live no longer to yourself but to Him who died for you and rose again? Do you desire to cease from all sin, and long to be holy? Have you some love to Christ and a fear of displeasing or dishonouring Him? Do you read His Word and study to do His will? Do you love God’s house, His day and His people?

Then the answer to the first question will be, I thank the Lord that He has made me better than I was naturally. It has been all of grace, and by the same grace I hope at last to be perfect.

Are you better? I ask again, and I hear young hearts reply, “I am afraid not”. To you then God’s Word says, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shall be saved.”

Felix Neff: Pastor of the High Alps

1. His Conversion, and a Murderer’s

Felix was born in Switzerland sometime in 1798. His father seems to have died when Felix was very young and his mother brought him up in a little village near Geneva. She gave Felix some basic education, and the village pastor began to teach him Latin, but that did not last long. Felix read whatever books he could lay his hands on, if he felt they would provide him with

some useful knowledge. It seems that he did not want to waste time on novels, for instance. When he was 12, a young friend of his pressed him to go to see a popular play, but Felix could not be persuaded to go; he did not want to waste what he believed was valuable time.

Later he became an apprentice to a gardener, which led to him writing a book about trees when he was just 16. The next year he seems to have been in debt, which forced him to join the army, and within two years he was promoted to the rank of sergeant. His army service gave him the opportunity to study maths and physics. Somehow Neff was brought to consider seriously his motives in life. He had to acknowledge that all his good works, including keeping God's commandments, had no better end in view than to make other people think better of him, and no doubt to think well of himself.

To realise this upset him and he was conscious of having an unbelieving spirit. He prayed, "Whatever Thy character may be, make me to know Thy truth". And he asked God to show Himself to his soul. He was given a deep conviction of his guilt before God and shown that he needed to be reconciled to Him. He began to read the Bible seriously and soon realised that this was the only book that truly described the state of his soul – though as yet he could only think of God as his Judge.

He was now attending a church where he could hear the gospel. He visited one of the ministers, who lent him a small book, called, *Honey Flowing From the Rock*. And no doubt, Christ was the Rock that the title of the book was pointing to. God blessed this book to him and gave him clear views of what the Bible tells us about God and how a sinner can be saved.

Up till then, Neff had lived only for himself, but now his heart went out to God in love and thankfulness. He believed that God was calling him to be a minister. Even while still a soldier, he tried to make the gospel known in the barracks, in prisons and in hospitals.

In 1819 Neff was able to leave the army and he gave himself to visiting the villages round about Geneva. He had many relations in these villages and visited them to read the Bible to them and explain it. He often climbed up a rough path in the Jura mountains, on the French-Swiss border, to visit a poor shepherd who, Neff believed, showed some evidence of having true religion. At this time he was studying the Bible himself, very carefully and seriously, making a lot of notes on what he was reading.

Someone asked him to visit a young soldier in a prison some distance away, who had served with Neff in the same regiment. The soldier had been convicted of murder and sentenced to death. Neff thought of his soul and longed to tell him the gospel of peace. He contacted one of his friends, who knew one of the judges in that area, to ask this man for permission for Neff

to visit the prisoner. The judge gave permission and even invited Neff to stay with him; he told Neff that the prisoner seemed very concerned about his spiritual state and concerned also if his victim had been prepared for eternity before he died.

Neff entered the prisoner's cell and found him very upset. And when the man managed to speak, he said to Neff: "My friend, what a state you find me in! What have I done? What will become of me?" He went on, "I am lost. O, if the good God would pity me. If I knew He would pardon me, it would be nothing then to die, but" His situation was terrible; he was sleeping very little because he was being disturbed by terrible nightmares. And he was not able to eat much.

Of course, Neff knew that his former comrade had committed a dreadful crime. But he tried to assure the prisoner that God does pardon sin. He spoke about the Lamb of God, who was "bruised for our iniquities" and is making "intercession for the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:5,12). Neff told the prisoner that he had always needed a Saviour and that, before he became guilty of murder, he was wandering from God, a rebel; so even then he was under condemnation and could find no salvation in himself. To confirm what he had said, Neff read to him from several parts of the Bible and then gave him a tract about the conversion and death of a criminal called William Mills. Before he left, Neff encouraged him to come to Christ with confidence.

That evening, Neff returned to the prison. The prisoner had already finished reading the tract a second time, and it seemed to have brought a ray of hope into his mind. Neff read to him some verses from John's Gospel and told him: "Go to Jesus; He calls you". If the man would go to Jesus – that is, if he would believe on Him – then, Neff told him, "He will relieve you of the burden of all your sin and load you with blessings. It is His delight to comfort the afflicted, to give grace to sinners; He came for that purpose." The next morning, Neff was back at the prison. The prisoner told him that he had slept better – no doubt, because he had been told that there was hope even for such a sinner as he was. Neff asked the judges to give him a New Testament.

Neff travelled back three more times to the town where the jail was, to visit the prisoner. At each visit, he found that the man was growing in knowledge and spending a lot of time in prayer. On one of his later visits, Neff could see evidence that the prisoner had become a new creature in Christ Jesus. He would speak of the goodness of God, who in great mercy could take pity on a murderer, a rebel against Him, and who had so long despised Him. God, he told Neff, had "shown to him the depravity of his heart and his urgent need of a Saviour". He would often burst out in such words as these: "Yes, my God is with me. . . . He has pardoned me."

The prisoner would speak of Christ's desire that he would not perish: "He came to seek me when I was a lost sheep, an unthankful wretch, a rebel who despised Him; He came to snatch me from hell, to raise me to heaven. Nothing shall separate me from my Saviour. If He will take me out of the world, I shall be with Him, still nearer to Him; if He will leave me here below, I will set apart my whole life to Him. Yes, I will tell men that He is good, that He is merciful. I will tell them to come to Him or they will be lost."

At that time the prisoner expected to be executed as a murderer, but instead his sentence was reduced to 10 years in prison. This was because there were good reports of his previous behaviour, and it was somehow clear that he could not have decided beforehand to commit the murder.

He now had as his friend a man guilty of a crime similar to his own, who was to teach him how to make shoes. A pastor who visited them reported, "They work together, blessing God for being alone, and speaking of the great truths of the gospel. [The first prisoner] . . . explains the Scriptures" to the other. He "is sometimes sad and distressed when he remembers his crime, but soon, recalling the astonishing grace of the Lord, he blesses Him with joy." God had indeed done wonderful things for these men – and it is a wonderful work of mercy whenever God converts a sinner.

For Younger Readers

"Did You Say It to Yourself Then?"

A little girl usually came home from school at lunchtime. But one day, instead of coming home, she was to go for a school lunch.

At home, someone always said grace before their meal. They thanked God for giving them their food. But at school no one said grace for the children. When the girl came home, she told her mother about what happened at school.

Her mother asked her: "Did you say it to yourself then?"

At once the girl answered, "O no! To God."

Of course, the girl did not understand what her mother meant. Her mother was really asking if she said grace quietly – thanking God for her food quietly. Or even without making any noise at all. God would still hear her. He hears everything.

Even when it is a grown up who says grace, you too must thank God for the food. And when there is no grown up around who will say grace, you will have to thank God yourself.

*For Junior Readers***Forget not . . .**

As the end of another year approaches I am sure you will be thinking back over the things which have happened in your lives this year. Some events may have been disappointing or even sad, but I think there are many things which you should be thankful for, which you should specially thank God for at the close of this year.

What did David say at the beginning of Psalm 103? “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and *forget not* all His benefits.”

And what did Paul advise the Philippians (in chapter 4)? “In every thing by prayer and supplication, *with thanksgiving*, let your requests be made known unto God.” We might be very ready to ask God for various things, but do we also remember to give Him thanks for what we receive?

Sir William Dobbie was appointed Governor of Malta in 1940, in the early part of World War 2. Malta was then a British colony, part of the British Empire, and under her protection. But it was in a very isolated position, far from Britain, in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea. Its defences were weak and all its supplies had to come by sea. To make things worse, Italy had entered the war on the side of Germany; and the island of Sicily, at the toe of Italy, is only about 50 miles north of Malta. In fact they expected that Italy might invade them at any time.

But Dobbie was very conscious that God was able to help and protect them. He, and other praying people on the island, drew much encouragement from people in the Bible who prayed to God in similar circumstances. For example, Hezekiah: “With us is the Lord our God to help us, and to fight our battles”; and Asa: “Lord, it is nothing with Thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power; help us, O Lord our God; for we rest on Thee, and in Thy name we go against this multitude”.

Instances of the Lord’s care and protection were seen in many ways throughout the siege. The enemy was kept back from invading; supplies got through to them, sometimes in conditions that seemed impossible. And Malta remained in British hands at that time.

Many times they could see that God was acting to protect them. They had to acknowledge by the end of the siege, “If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when men rose up against us: then they had swallowed us up quick . . . then the waters had overwhelmed us . . . our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth” (Psalm 124). Perhaps you could look up the Psalm and read it all.

Looking back on all the proofs he had seen of God's mercy and gracious help over these two years, Dobbie had to say with his whole heart, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and *forget not* all His benefits". Should you also not remember God's kindness to you over a past year and give Him thanks for it all?

J van Kralingen

Jack and His Bible

A minister in Canada went into a little hut. There he found a Native American boy called Jack, who was ill; in fact he was dying. He was very poor in the things of this world; under him there was nothing but a few ferns, with just an old blanket covering him. The minister told him: "I am very sorry to see you in this state". If the boy had let the him know, the minister added, he would have found somewhere better for Jack to live.

He answered, "It is very little I need now, and these poor people get it for me. But I should like something softer to lie on, as my bones are very sore.

But spiritually, Jack was very rich. When the minister asked about these things, the boy told him that he was perfectly happy; that Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, had died to save him; and he had every confidence in Him.

The minister noticed a little Bible under a corner of the boy's blanket. He said, "Jack, you have a friend there; I am glad to see that; I hope you find something good there".

Although Jack was weak, he raised himself up on his elbow and, with a smile on his face, said slowly, "This is my dear friend. You gave it to me. For a long time I read it much and often thought of what it told. Last year I went to see my sister at Lake Winnipeg [about 200 miles away], where I stayed about two months. When I was halfway back through the Lake, I remembered that I had left my Bible behind me. I at once turned round. I was nine days by myself, tossing to and fro, before I could reach the house. But I found my friend [his Bible] and decided that I would not part with it again."

Ever afterwards Jack had kept it beside him. At first he thought he would ask for it to be buried with him, but then he realised it would be better to give it back to the minister, so that someone else might get good from it.

All this time a terrible cough kept interrupting his speaking, and when he finished he sank down exhausted. The minister read the Bible and prayed with him. Perhaps it was the last time the minister saw him, before Jack's soul was taken away to heaven, where he would have no more coughing or any other signs of his illness – and where he would have no more sin.

Do you value Jack's friend? Do you trust in the Saviour revealed in it?

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)

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Looking Around Us

Christmas Trees

Already, before the middle of November, Christmas trees are appearing in shops. Christmas is associated, in most people's minds, with the day when Christ was born in Bethlehem. But there is no mention in the Bible of a tree in connection with the Saviour's birth, and no command to remember His birth with a festival.

Instead the use of evergreen trees as a symbol goes back to places like ancient Egypt and Rome, long before the coming of Christ. People attached special meaning to plants and trees that stayed green throughout the winter. So they hung evergreen branches over their doors and windows. They believed that such branches would keep away witches, ghosts, evil spirits and illness. Many idolatrously treated the sun as a god, and assumed that, in the short days of a northern winter, their sun god had become sick and weak. How foolish to believe that a god could get sick! They held a festival at the time of the shortest day of the year because they expected the sun would then begin to recover. Evergreen branches suggested to them that green plants would grow when the sun god was strong and summer would return.

This is all pure superstition, and has nothing to do with Christianity. We should have nothing whatever to do with it.

The Sea of Galilee

This poem, by Robert Murray M'Cheyne was written beside the Sea of Galilee
in 1839

How pleasant to me thy deep blue wave,

O sea of Galilee!

For the glorious One who came to save

Hath often stood by thee.

Fair are the lakes in the land I love,

Where pine and heather grow;

But thou hast loveliness far above

What nature can bestow.

It is not that the wild gazelle

Comes down to drink thy tide,

But He that was pierced to save from hell

Oft wandered by thy side.

It is not that the fig tree grows,
And palms, in thy soft air,
But that Sharon's fair and bleeding Rose
Once spread its fragrance there.

Graceful around thee the mountains meet,
Thou calm reposing sea;
But ah, far more, the beautiful feet
Of Jesus walked o'er thee.

These days are past – Bethsaida, where?
Chorazin, where art thou?
His tent the wild Arab pitches there,
The wild reeds shade thy brow.

Tell me, ye mouldering fragments, tell,
Was the Saviour's city here?
Lifted to heaven, has it sunk to hell,
With none to shed a tear?

Ah, would my flock from thee might learn
How days of grace will flee;
How all an offered Christ who spurn
Shall mourn at last, like thee.

And was it beside this very sea,
The new-risen Saviour said
Three times to Simon, "Lovest thou me?
My lambs and sheep then feed."

O Saviour, gone to God's right hand,
Yet the same Saviour still,
Graved on Thy heart is this lovely strand
And every fragrant hill.

O give me, Lord, by this sacred wave,
Threefold Thy love divine,
That I may feed, till I find my grave,
Thy flock – both Thine and mine.

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