

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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Volume 89

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Number 4

Christ Came to Save Great Sinners

It is the central truth of the Bible that “Christ Jesus came into the world to **save sinners**” (1 Timothy 1:15). So this should be central to the message of every preacher, and it should be central to the thinking of everyone who has the least contact with Scripture teaching. We are sinners; we are condemned to be punished because of our sins. So we need to be saved, and a salvation – a suitable salvation – has been provided, for “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”.

When He came into the world, He took human nature. “He took not on Him the nature of angels”; He did not come to save angels. “But He took on Him the seed of Abraham” (Hebrews 2:16) because He came to save human beings. He must suffer in the nature that sinned – human nature – because He was to suffer in the place of those who were to be saved.

They were human beings who sinned – Adam and Eve first of all. So the One who was to come to save sinners like them must suffer the punishment that was due to such sinners, and he must suffer that punishment in the same nature – human nature.

Peter tells us that “Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18). In other words, Christ suffered as the righteous One and He did so in the place of unrighteous people, so that they might be reconciled to God. Sin stands in the way of us being at one with God. But Christ suffered in the place of sinners and took away the guilt of their sin so that they might be at one with God when they would believe on Him.

Sinners are called to come to Christ. He says, “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). To *come* to Christ is to believe on Him, to trust in Him for salvation – just as the jailor in Philippi was called: “*Believe* on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31).

The jailor believed and was saved; he was brought to God. His sins – which had separated between the jailor and God – were forgiven and, from then on, there was nothing to separate between him and the holy God. His

sins were no longer held against him; his guilt had been washed away. And so it is with everyone, past or present, who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, no matter how serious their sins have been.

In the early 1700s there was a minister in London called Thomas Bradbury. One evening, as he was conducting prayer with his family and servants, a group of men passing his house noticed a door open. They thought it was a good opportunity to get inside and take away whatever they could lay their hands on. Their leader at once slipped in and crept carefully upstairs. There he began to hear Bradbury's solemn voice asking the Lord for protection from, among others, cut-throats and thieves.

The Lord at once heard Bradbury's prayer though the minister did not realise that he was at that moment in danger, in need of God's deliverance. The would-be thief took fright; for a little time he was too frightened to move. But he managed to tear himself away and rejoined his companions outside. They scolded him for being so scared. No doubt, they did not realise that God caused their leader to feel impressed. And, thankfully, the man did not lose his impressions.

He returned the next day to Bradbury's house and confessed what he had done. The most wonderful thing was that, as a result of the conversation between the two men, the thief was converted. Eventually he became a member in the congregation of which Bradbury was minister.

It was God's power that stopped this man in his tracks when he was ready to carry away anything he could find in Bradbury's house. It was the same power that made him realise that he was a sinner before God. It was this power that made him able and willing to turn away from his life of sin and look by faith to the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation.

He was saved because Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, whether cut-throats and thieves, or those who keep God's commandments outwardly but go on refusing to trust in the Saviour whom God the Father sent to deliver sinners from eternal destruction in hell. It is the same power that each of us needs to turn us from our own ways, so that we will believe in Christ and start off on the way to the blessedness of heaven.

Among the other great sinners who have been overcome by God's power was King Manasseh. He was very different from his father, godly Hezekiah, who sought to follow the Lord fully. We are told that Manasseh "did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, like unto the abominations of the heathen" (2 Chronicles 33:2). And some of these abominable practices are listed: building altars to heathen gods at the temple of the true God, worshipping the stars, burning some of his children as sacrifices to a false god, practising witchcraft and murdering vast numbers of God's people.

You might think that God would very quickly sweep this great sinner away in judgement. But no, God was going to show, not only the greatness of His power in saving Manasseh, but also the greatness of His grace. God's grace is His kindness to those who are unworthy of any kindness – who do not deserve any kindness from the great God who has the right to punish sinners, whether their sins are more or less serious.

What did Manasseh deserve? To be sent away at once to a lost eternity. But what do other people deserve, no matter how carefully they try to keep God's commandments outwardly but are still rebelling against Christ's calls to believe in Him? They are still unsaved; their sins are still unforgiven. So the answer is the same as the one to the last question: they deserve to be sent away at once to a lost eternity.

God showed mercy to Manasseh. He did not give the wicked king what he deserved. After Manasseh was taken to Babylon as a prisoner, "when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto Him" (2 Chronicles 33: 12,13). God heard Manasseh's prayers.

In particular, God "brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom". But that was not all; we are told that "Manasseh knew that the Lord He was God". The King learned that it was his duty to worship Jehovah, to serve Him, to trust in Him as the Saviour of his soul and to obey from his heart all the commandments that God had revealed in Scripture.

How sad Manasseh must have been as he looked back on the past years of his ungodly life – a life of fearful rebellion against a good God! Now he sought, no doubt, to thank God from his heart for the great mercy He had shown to him, someone who most certainly did not deserve any act of kindness whatever. And he now sought to live a godly life. We are told that he took away the images of the false gods that he had worshipped and the altars he had built, even at God's temple. He worshipped God as He had commanded, offering sacrifices as he was told in the law of Moses.

The power of God over Manasseh was shown in the Lord making him willing to turn from his false religion to trust in the living and true God, who had created all things. But that power was further shown in making this King willing to live a godly life and to encourage the people of his country "to serve the Lord God of Israel" (2 Chronicles 33:16).

But what about you? Have you turned from your sins and, especially, from your unbelief, to serve the living God? Is it your greatest desire to be found in Christ, not having, as a basis for salvation, your "own righteousness, which is of the law", but having the righteousness "which is through the faith of Christ" . . . and "is [from] God by faith"? (Philippians 3:9).

John Bunyan

2. Seeking Salvation

Rev George B Macdonald

This is another part of a paper given to last year's Youth Conference in New Zealand. The first part, last month, spoke about Bunyan's early life, including his ungodliness, his marriage and his convictions of the sin of Sabbath breaking.

*H*is recovery from swearing. Another sin that Bunyan was much addicted to was swearing. Mercifully he was delivered from his brazen show of wickedness. The Lord used the rebuke of an ungodly woman to arrest Bunyan and greatly restrain him in the future from this sin.

He writes, "One day, as I was cursing at a neighbour's shop window, cursing and swearing and playing the madman after my wanton manner; inside there sat the woman of the house, who heard me. Though she was a very loose and ungodly wretch, yet she protested that I swore and cursed at such a most fearful rate that she was made to tremble to hear me. She told me further that I, by thus doing, was able to spoil all the youth in the whole town if they but came in my company.

"At this reproof I was silenced and put to secret shame, and also, I thought, before the God of heaven. Wherefore while I stood there hanging down my head, I wished with all my heart that I might be a little child again and that my father might teach me to speak without this wicked way of swearing. I reasoned that I was so accustomed to it that it was in vain for me to think of reformation, which I thought could never be."

Here again we see the deceitfulness of the devil in seeking to convince poor Bunyan that, as he was so accustomed to swearing, there was no hope of reform, no likelihood of change. Is this so with us? Remember that this was a terrible temptation of Satan. It is also a warning to us against going on in the ways of sin lest we be so tempted.

Mercifully, this rebuke from a sinful woman made an impact on Bunyan, as he goes on to admit: "But – how it came to pass I know not – from that time forward I did so quit my swearing that it was a great wonder to myself to observe it. Whereas before I did not know how to speak unless I put an oath before and another after to make my words have authority; now I could without an oath speak better and with more pleasantness than ever before. All this while I knew not Jesus Christ, neither did I stop my sports and plays." This shows us that, while people may repent of some gross sins, and even cease from them, yet a sinner may continue a stranger to a saving knowledge of Christ.

Such was the outward change on Bunyan that some of his neighbours

took him to be a godly man and wondered at the outward change. They began to praise him and commend him, both to his face and behind his back. Sadly, this unwise course of action on their part only served to puff him up with pride and self-righteousness. It is a reminder to us how careful we need to be about people who undergo a great change. It may only be outward.

As Bunyan states, “When I understood those were their words and opinions of me, it pleased me very well, for though as yet I was nothing but a poor painted hypocrite, yet I loved to be talked of as one that was truly godly. I was proud of my godliness, and indeed I did all I did either to be seen or to be well spoken of by men. Thus I continued for about 12 months or more.”

His Conversion. The process of coming out of darkness into the marvellous light of the gospel seems to have been gradual with Bunyan. We have seen already how the Lord, in His providential dealings, awakened him to some care for his soul, though his continuing in some sins shows us that his heart was still wedded to sin. The fear of death was one means the Lord used to bring him to deeper conviction of sin. He was afraid of death, to the extent that he gave up the practice of ringing the church bells, for fear that one of the bells would fall on him. At last he would not even go to see this activity; he was afraid the whole steeple might fall on his head. He began to read the Scriptures with great earnestness.

As he reflected on this point in his life, when he was much convicted of the weight of eternal things, Bunyan wrote, “My mind was so focused on eternity and on the things of the kingdom of heaven that, so far as I knew – though as yet God knows I knew but little – neither pleasures, nor profits, nor persuasions, nor threats could loosen it or make it let go of its hold. Although I may speak it with shame, yet it is indeed a certain truth that it would then have been as difficult for me to have taken my mind from heaven to earth as I have found it often since to get it again from earth to heaven.”

A period of intense conviction followed. It could be said of Bunyan that, for some time, he mounted to the heavens; then he went down to the depths again. Around this time, he came across some writings of those who were called Ranters. Some of the older church members held these writings in high regard. Naturally Bunyan was interested to know what they were and whether they might do his soul good. He read and considered their position but felt difficulty in judging them at that stage in his spiritual experience. He records a simple prayer that he offered to God for guidance:

“O Lord, I am a fool and not able to know the truth from error. Lord, leave me not to my own blindness, either to approve of or condemn this doctrine. If it be of God, let me not despise it; if it be of the devil, let me not embrace it.”

In this simple way, John Bunyan sought help from God. Though older members in the church, and others, regarded these religious writings as useful, Bunyan refused to rest in man's judgment. He was aware of the great danger of error and sought to be guided by God.

Some of the many writings in the world today are neither safe nor good. We should pray that God would guide us to read that which is truly good and likely to do us good. We should humbly acknowledge that, like Bunyan, we are in danger of being led astray, and should therefore ask the Lord to keep us. We have great need of the spirit of discernment, so that we might have sound judgement to separate the precious from the vile.

The Lord mercifully kept Bunyan from drinking in wrong views and turning a Ranter, as one of his friends did – sinning with evident abandon and being strengthened by a course of error. It is truly fearful when some people are given up to go on in sin after being blinded by error in doctrine.

Not long after this, Bunyan had what he terms a vision, of the distinction between the truly godly in Bedford and himself. Given the deep and lasting impact it had on him, it seems best to quote the passage from *Grace Abounding*: “About this time, the happiness and state of these poor people at Bedford were presented to me in a kind of vision. I saw as if they were on the sunny side of some high mountain, refreshing themselves with the pleasant beams of the sun, while I was shivering and shrinking in the cold, afflicted with frost, snow, and dark clouds. I thought also between me and them I saw a wall that encompassed this mountain. Now through this wall my soul greatly desired to pass, concluding that if I could, I would even go into the very middle of them, and there also comfort myself with the heat of their sun. I saw myself going around this wall again and again, still prying as I went to see if I could find some way of passage by which I might enter, but none could I find for some time.

“At the last I saw a narrow gap, like a little doorway in the wall, through which I attempted to pass. Now the passage being very strait and narrow, I made many efforts to get in, but all in vain, even until I was quite exhausted by striving to enter. At last, with great effort, I thought I at first did get my head in, and after that, by a sidelong effort, my shoulders and my whole body. Then being exceeding glad, I went and sat down in the middle of them, and so was comforted with the light and heat of their sun.”

He goes on to explain what he interpreted these things to mean: “Now the meanings of the mountain and wall were thus revealed to me. The mountain signified the Church of the living God; the sun that shone there, the comfortable shining of His merciful face on those that were there; the wall was the wall that made separation between Christians and the world; and the

gap that was in the wall was Jesus Christ, who is the way to God the Father (John 14:6; Matthew 7:14).

We see in all this the seeds for some later themes, to be found in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. For instance, the earnest desire that Christian has for peace with God, in that book, Bunyan had in his own experience.

About Idolaters

2. Worshipping the Idol of Pleasure

Brownlow North

This is the first section of an address taken, with editing, from a book about the Prodigal Son. North was, in his youth, thoroughly ungodly but, after being converted, he became a well-known preacher. Last month's article spoke of those who worship wooden idols, or idols of gold. But those who worship money are really no different.

Luke 15:14. *And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.*

Or let us take the case of two others who worship the gods of this world: the highest and the lowest perhaps of all the earthly gods. These are the worshippers of the gods of pleasure, and of high moral and social position.

By the worshipper of the god of pleasure – and there are, sadly, too many of them – I mean he who has no higher idea of happiness than do the beasts that perish. And by the worshipper of the god of position, I mean he whose ambition is a good reputation and fame, to be highly respected and looked up to by other people.

Both these gods demand sacrifice; indeed there is no god, whether the God of heaven or among the gods of earth, who does not demand sacrifice from his worshippers. His you are to whom you yield yourself servant to obey (Rom 6:16). And the proof of who is our God lies in the answer to the question: Whom do we sacrifice to?

Look at that youth, who worships the god of pleasure: how he sacrifices to his god, and his god is doing all he can for him! What a merry fellow he appears: full of life and high spirits, without a sorrow or a care! How many of those who know him envy his enjoyments, his freedom from the drudgery of self-control and discipline – although (and well it is for them that it is so) they dare not make the sacrifices his god requires. He works very hard for his god; especially he tries to bring him other worshippers.

See him when he meets his friend, the man who is worshipping position: how he urges him to make some sacrifice to the god of pleasure. He says,

You must be very dull; come with me, if only for this evening, and let us eat, drink and be merry. The theatre and the dance are the places for happiness; the racecourse, the card table, and the billiard room, the places to make a quick fortune. Come and do anything you like; only come with me, and we will have a merry time together.

But the worshipper of position knows better. It might be all pleasant enough while it lasts, but he has something besides pleasure to attend to: he has his character to think of, his way to make in the world. And for the sake of a moment's enjoyment he will not do what might injure his future prospects for life. He says, I will not go; and they part: one to his pleasure, and the other to his business. It was impossible they could walk together, for their gods were not the same.

A few months, or at the most a few years after this – for no one can stand long the sacrifice of health required by this most cruel of all gods, the god of pleasure – see this worshipper laid low on the bed of sickness and death. As he looks back on the past, and forward to the future, what can the god of pleasure do for him? Has he not brought him to need? Where is the good name with which he started in life? Where are the means by which he might have got on in the world if he had used them properly? Where is the good health he once had? Where are the prospects of a happy old age? Where are his friends and his parents?

His god would still do anything for him he could, but what can he do? Unless, through grace and mercy, he yet changes his god and flies for refuge to the Lord Jesus Christ, there is no more pleasure for him either in time or in eternity. He is dying; his days of pleasure have come to an end on earth, and there is no pleasure in hell.

For Junior Readers

How Can We Know the Way?

In other countries, like Poland, winters can be very cold, far colder than in Britain. Snow may cover the ground for months on end, and people may use a sleigh pulled by a horse to get from one place to another.

In Britain many of us think of a snowfall as a hindrance rather than a help to getting around; in Poland the snow may make for a smoother ride. Yes, what we think of as a hindrance may prove a help at last, for in the Christian's spiritual journey "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28).

The horse is well-groomed and full of energy; his breath looks like steam

on the wintry air. Its harness and horseshoes have all been checked over before the start of the journey. The sleigh too has been made as comfortable as travelling will allow. The riders' clothing is warm, but still a trackless waste of white seems to face them when they set out. And a trackless waste faces us when we start off on every new stage of our journey through life.

We can be sure that the driver has the means to guide the sleigh. For the believer, Christ is the One that holds the reins: He is the answer to the question, How can we know the way? (John 14:5,6). Too many today feel no need for a guide on life's journey (But the last verse in Judges speaks of every man in Israel doing what was right in his own eyes.) How dangerous!

But it is at our peril we ignore the God-given guide that we have in His Holy Word. For example, from the very beginning of the world, God Himself gave man the pattern of one day's rest in seven. So we too may each week have one whole day's rest from our work to think about God's good work and worship Him.

And we are meant to follow another pattern: the marriage union of the man and the woman as long as they both lived (and Adam lived to a good age). This mirrors the unbreakable, loving union of Christ and His Church.

Yes, there is a Guide for us. But how we stray! Which is why our need of a Saviour is so great. Is Jesus Christ a Guide to us, and much more? Then, be assured, all is in His hands. With Christ as our Guide, we know that we shall at last arrive at those "everlasting habitations" in heaven, and dwell where Jesus is.

Adapted from *Cheering Words* for January 2006

A Drunken Father and a Godly Son

This article gives a lawyer's account of a man he often met in the course of his business, helping him to buy and sell property. The man's name began with the letter M, and we may call him Mark. He was known for his uncontrollable temper; he was often drunk and was given to bad language. He paid the lawyer well, but was not a nice person.

He called one day at my office, and we conducted our business. Mark seemed very subdued, very different from his usual manner. He was about to leave my office when I asked him what was the matter with him; he seemed so changed. He stopped, hesitated, but made no reply. I asked him again what could have happened to make such a change in his whole manner.

Mark answered, "Something *has* happened; I am indeed an altered man. I had a little son, about nine years old. He was dear to me as the apple of my eye. At times, when I went home from my work drunk, I abused my wife, drove her and my children from the house, broke the furniture and did all in

my power to make my family as miserable as myself. But this little boy, when I was at the height of my anger, would watch me, and when I would sit down, would steal up to my knee, climb up on my lap, pass his little hand through my hair and tame me down; I could not resist. Then my wife and the other children would fearlessly come in, knowing from experience that my little son had subdued me, and I was in his power.

"Well, my son took sick. It was evident to me that he would not recover. I sat by his bedside; he was in a doze. The tears gushed from my eyes as I watched him; my heart was sad indeed.

He awoke; he turned his face toward me and said, "Father, you are crying. What is the matter?"

"I am afraid, my son, I am going to lose you; you are going to die."

"Well, Father, I know I am going to die. But I am not afraid to die, for I will go to Jesus"

"To Jesus! Why, what do you know about Jesus?"

"Father, you know Mother used to send me to the Sabbath school at the corner, and the teachers told me all about Jesus and taught me how to pray. And for this reason, Father, I was never afraid of you when you came home drunk and abused poor Mother and the children. I saw that you could not injure me. Now, Father, I am going to die, and would die quite happy if you would promise me to do two things."

"Well, my son, what are they? If it is in my power, I will do them."

"Father, promise me that you will drink no more whisky; this is the cause of all poor Mother's distress . . . and Mother and the children would be happy. Well, Father, now promise me that you will pray."

"Pray! I don't know how to pray."

"Father, kneel down by my bed, and I will teach you how to pray."

The father explained, "I knelt down; he prayed; I followed, repeating his words. My heart was broken. He led me; I know not where, or how, or how long. But this I know: that light, comfort, peace and joy filled my soul, as I rejoiced in a sin-pardoning God.

"My wife came in; the children followed and all fell on their knees around the bed. We all rejoiced, and when I raised my head to bless the instrument of my conversion, he was dead. His spirit had been wafted away with the glad news of my repentance to heaven. He was an eyewitness to that joy which is among the angels of God over one sinner that repents. His hands were clasped as if in prayer, and a sweet smile sealed his lips in death."

God hears prayer. Nothing is too hard for Him to do. He can change the hardest heart and use the weakest instrument to bring about the change.

Adapted from The Christian Treasury for 1852

What Is My Hope?

Horatius Bonar

This article has been edited. Horatius Bonar was a minister who died in 1889.

“I hoped by this time to have been at the top,” said an old man, who had set out one pleasant autumn morning to climb the hill behind his house. But he had taken the wrong path, and was farther from the top than when he set out. He returned weary and disappointed. Like those of whom Job speaks, he was confounded, because he had hoped (Job 6:20).

“I hoped by this time to have been happy”, said a young man, as he sat at the helm of his splendid yacht, and steered her along in the sunshine. But with all his money, and the pleasure which it buys, he was duller and sadder than he was ten years before, when he set out to “enjoy life”. He had mistaken the way, and his soul was emptier than ever. He sighed and looked round upon the blue waves in vain; they could not help him. He was confounded because he had hoped. Year after year had passed, and he had been going farther from happiness. God was not in all his thoughts.

“I hoped by this time to have had peace with God”, said a man of 60, one Sabbath morning as he walked to the house of God. But he seemed as one who was farther off than ever from peace; and the thought of advancing years, without anything for eternity, made him sad. He had mistaken the way. He had laboured and prayed and fasted and done many good works; but there was one thing he had not done: he had not believed on Christ.

He had not counted all things but loss for Christ; he had not rested his soul on the one resting place. His had been a life of doing, not believing; of doubting, not trusting; and “he was confounded because he had hoped”. He preferred his own plan and continued his efforts to recommend himself to God. The peace he had been working for had not come; and the peace for which the Son of God had finished for the sinner, he had not received.

It is one thing to hope; it is another thing to hope well. To hope well is to hope according to what God has revealed about our future. Much has been written of “the pleasures of hope”, and much that is true and beautiful. These “pleasures”, for they are many, and man clings to them even in days of darkness and despair. It is not wrong to hope. God has put hope in every human breast; and the Book of God dwells much upon it, and upon “the things hoped for”. It is “good that a man should hope”, said the prophet. “Hope is “the anchor of the soul,” and is often shown in pictures – an anchor firmly fixed on the shore, holding fast a vessel beaten by wind and wave.

But, in order to be the anchor of the soul, hope must be something sure.

Man's hopes are often no more than his own wishes; even when they go further and lay hold of what is really true and lawful, they are not to be trusted; they endure but for a time. They disappoint him who trusts them. They leave behind only a void and aching heart. They fall to pieces of themselves, even when no storm crushes them. They are not to be trusted for a day. "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher; all is vanity."

One August evening, just before sunset, we saw a rainbow suddenly appear. It seemed to rise out of the dark clouds that hung in the sky, and drew our eyes by its completeness; nothing seemed missing, either in colour or in position. But if it was one of the brightest, it was also one of the briefest we ever saw. It had scarcely risen on the cloud when it disappeared. That fair bow was like man's hope, as brief as it was bright, as disappointing as it was promising. It melted off the sky, leaving nothing behind but the cheerless cloud. What is man? it said. What are man's hopes and joys and plans? They rise and fall; they shine and then return into darkness.

We remember a day in the desert of Sinai – a day of showers, with clear sunshine between. Over some high black rocks to the left of us, thin mists rapidly passed across the brown precipices. On these, rainbow after rainbow formed itself in beautiful succession; six or seven of them suddenly shining out and then disappearing, one after another – the brightest yet frailest things we had ever seen, so like what is real and abiding, yet so unreal and perishable. How like the dreams and hopes of man, disappointing and cheating human hearts with unsubstantial beauty!

The poor heart clings to such dreams and hopes, not merely in youth, but to old age. By means of such vain brightness, the heart is drawn away from Him who is brighter than all earthly brightness – the "brightness of [Jehovah's] glory, and the express image of His person," whose glory does not change, who is "the same yesterday, today, and for ever". O man, when will you be wise and fix your eye on what endures for ever, on what will fill your heart and gladden your soul to all eternity?

There was an old Scottish family, who owned large estates and had lived together for many years. One evening they all gathered, with relatives and friends. Within a few years, all was changed and all of them had been gathered into the family grave. The estate passed into other hands. The hopes that shined in each face that evening were speedily crushed, and the frailty of earth's fairest faces and fondest love was sadly shown. We never look on that family mansion without thinking of some text that tells of the vanity of human hope. In a dying world like this, we need a sure, undying hope.

It is written, "Thou destroyest the hope of man". Yes. Not only does man's hope fall to pieces by itself, but God destroys it before its time. Man

cannot be trusted with any earthly things. They become idols and must be broken, for “the idols He will utterly abolish”. Our hopes of a bright future here – of a long life, health, comfort, money, prosperity – must be checked, or else we would make earth our home and our heaven, forgetting the glory to be revealed and the pleasures at God’s right hand for ever. “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten; be zealous, therefore, and repent.”

But God presents a brighter hope – one that will last for ever. Man’s hope must be destroyed so that God’s hope may be built upon its ruins. Human hope is swept away that God’s hope may come instead. The temporal is in mercy taken from our grasp, that the eternal may be our inheritance.

There is what God calls “a *better* hope” – a hope with no death, a hope which God Himself gives, of which no one can rob us. It is divine and everlasting. It brings with it the peace which passes all understanding and it contains joy unspeakable and full of glory. No disappointment in it, and no mockery! It is sure and glorious, like Him from whom it comes. It is connected with a crown, an inheritance, a kingdom, a glory which fadeth not away, an eternity of joy such as eye has not seen nor ear heard.

The hope which God sets before us is no doubtful thing, but sure and glorious. It rests on His gospel; in believing it we become men of hope. Nothing else can give us any hope – at least what God calls by that name. A believed gospel brings peace and hope. The peace is sure and steadfast; so also is the hope it brings.

This gospel is the good news concerning Him who died, was buried and rose again. The story of His birth, life and death contains all we need to know for peace. Into the soul of him who receives that divine story this peace enters and remains – peace in believing, peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. This peace belongs “to him that worketh not, but believeth” (Romans 4:5); and he who has the peace has the hope that maketh not ashamed. Blessed union of peace and hope! We cannot have the hope without the peace, and we cannot have the peace without the hope (Romans 5:1,2). Through belief of the good news we have both.

Herein is love; thus we see God providing, not only for the present, but for the future, setting before us a crown and kingdom, and meanwhile giving us peace with Himself on earth until that kingdom comes. Herein is love; for thus we see God in His pity drying up our earthly wells and, at the same time, opening the wells of salvation – “the fountain of the water of life”.

Lift up your eyes and look to the future that lies before you! What will it be? Dark or bright? Your life is only a vapour. Will you not make sure of life everlasting? It is pressed on your acceptance by Him who came to give hope to the hopeless, life to the dead, peace to the troubled, rest to the weary.

What He did in dying on the cross is what you have to rest on for eternity. It is a sure resting place. You need no other. He that believes enters into *rest*!

Yes, and he that believes enters a new life and begins a holy walk – a life and a walk corresponding to the faith which receives both the grace of the cross and the glory of the kingdom. “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature”; and that same Holy Spirit, who drew Him to the cross, is given to him that he may follow Christ and be holy, as He was holy.

Truth and Right

Rev Alexander McPherson

One of the evil results of sin is the lack of peace and, only too often, this develops into open conflict. Isaiah says, “The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt” (Is 57:21).

One form of warfare that goes on all the time is between truth and error, and right and wrong. But it is a mercy that there is this conflict. If there were not, it would show that there was only evil in the world and that no one cared about truth and righteousness. What is often called the common grace of God has ensured that mankind has not completely lost their regard for truth and right and good, so that people without saving grace are found contending for these qualities which are so necessary to the wellbeing of mankind.

The Bible leaves us in no doubt about God's love of truth and righteousness. It says that “God is light and in Him is no darkness at all”. And believers are spoken of as walking “in the light as [God] is in the light”. What is meant by this light? We think that it is the very atmosphere, as it were, in which God has His being – His truth and righteousness. You just cannot think of God, the supreme and absolutely perfect Being, without associating Him with truth and righteousness. So we find that the Bible refers again and again to God as true and righteous, and speaking truth and doing what is right. Moses says of God, the Rock: “A God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He”.

At the other end of the Bible, in Revelation, John sees a vision of God's redeemed ones singing, “Great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints”. And in the pages between, the same qualities of truth and right, so basic to the nature and being of God, are mentioned more often than we can quote. For instance, Psalm 111 says, “The works of His hands are verity [that is, truth] and judgement”. The Scriptures also state repeatedly that God loves those who

do righteously and who speak the truth, and hates those who work iniquity and practise lies.

Now this warfare between right and wrong, and truth and error, is one in which we all are involved, young as well as old. Our duty is always to speak truthfully – and to do what is right. It is our duty because God's law commands it. How well we perform it will largely depend on whether we have saving grace. A natural, unrenewed person can have, as we noted, a regard for what is good, but a saved sinner has an even greater regard, seeing that the Word and Spirit of God have taught him the importance and value of truth and right. By the knowledge of spiritual truth he came out of darkness into God's marvellous light.

And as one who has been freely justified (or, accounted righteous) through faith in Jesus Christ, and brought through the renewing of his heart to love righteousness, he esteems the right and good as never before. In the Bible it is those who had grace in their hearts who were found faithfully contending for truth and right, and performing their duty in spite of opposition and difficulties.

David saw it was his duty to oppose Goliath, the Philistine champion who defied the armies of Israel, and Israel's God too. He did what he saw to be right in spite of his youth and weakness, and the disapproval of his oldest brother. He trusted in God who had helped him before in carrying out difficult duties, and the Lord was with him again.

It was the same with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego when they refused to worship Nebuchadnezzar's golden image, and were threatened with the fiery furnace. They refused to yield to the threat and persisted in their duty to worship God only. God was with them and delivered them.

Peter and John likewise held firmly to the path of duty when they were ordered by the Jewish rulers not to preach the gospel any more. "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."

As we have said, even young people, even children, may often have to stand up for what is right and to condemn the wrong – to uphold the truth and denounce the false. At school, among your friends, at work and at play; each one will be faced with the duty of taking the Lord's side. Even more will the duty become clear when childhood's days are over, and you go out into the world to work or to continue your studies. Unrighteousness, falsehood and error spread unchecked in our day.

Seek grace, each one of you, to receive Christ as Saviour and to follow Him as Lord. Then you will find that He will give strength and wisdom and courage for this warfare in which you will have to take part all your days. It

will not be easy. Warfare never is. You will often have to conclude, "Vain is the help of man." But in contending for truth and right you will find God to be your Helper. And in the end, whatever setbacks you may experience, you will be more than conquerors through Christ, who loved His people.

For Younger Readers

"Follow Me"

We had arranged for our two cars to travel one after the other to where we were going. The leading driver knew the place but not the other. So the second driver needed to keep the first one in sight

We have known how difficult it is to do this in the centre of a busy city, with traffic lights, other cars nudging in, changing lanes and so on. Now we were in the country, in Wales, and traffic was lighter. But still the same rule applied, "Keep the leading car in view. Keep as close as you can."

It was a comfort, of course, to know that our loved ones in front were also keeping their eyes on us, checking in their mirrors. And if we fell behind, we would soon see them waiting at the side of the road till we caught up.

What a lovely light this shines on Jesus' command to His disciples, "Follow Me"! He knows the end of His people's journey. He, their loved One, goes on in front. His disciples seek not to lose sight of Him, but other things often get in the way. It is good for them to know that He is watching all the while. He will never forget them and is nearer than they think.

Adapted from Cheering Words for January 2006

What Is Safety?

Someone asked a missionary from New Zealand, working in Guatemala, in Central America: "Is it dangerous to serve the Lord in this land?"

His answer was, "Safety is not in the absence of danger but in the presence of the Lord".

No doubt there were dangers in Guatemala, or the question would not have been asked. But if the Lord was with the missionary, then the all-powerful One, who rules over everything, was able to keep him safe.

There were dangers in New Zealand too, and there are dangers wherever we are – for our bodies and our souls. We need always to be asking God to take care of us. Especially we need to ask God to prepare us for eternity. How awful to plunge into eternity without having Christ for our Saviour!

Looking Around Us

“Moving with the Times”

Abram Lyle, described as “a deeply religious Scots businessman” was a sugar refiner in Greenock, in the west of Scotland. In the 1880s he began to produce what he called “Lyle’s Golden Syrup” and was soon selling it in tins which pictured a dead lion surround by a swarm of bees. Underneath the picture were the words, “out of the strong came forth sweetness”.

Perhaps you recognise the words as part of the riddle Samson put to the Philistines at his wedding feast (see Judges 14). No doubt Abram Lyle felt that a reference to Scripture was appropriate for his new product.

In fact the design of the tin has not changed to this day, but the syrup is now also sold in a variety of other forms of packaging, including plastic bottles. It was announced in February that the design on all these other forms of packaging, apart from the tin, were to change, to show the face of a lion. The brand director of Lyle’s Golden Syrup announced, “Consumers need to see brands moving with the times”.

It is a pity to lose a clear reference to the Bible from so much of the Golden Syrup range, though it is unlikely that many who buy the product recognise its source. Yet it is good that it remains unchanged on syrup *tins*.

Sadly, too many things are moving with the times, and many of them far more important than syrup containers. For too many people, religion has to move with the times, or be dropped altogether. But our religion should stay firmly fixed on the Bible and its teachings. Our moral code, our standard for living, should stay firmly fixed on the Ten Commandments and all that these commandments imply. Our understanding of the way of salvation should stay firmly fixed on the teachings of Jesus, the Apostles and on all that we find in the Bible, pointing us to the only Saviour, Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The Good Physician

How lost was my condition,
Till Jesus made me whole!
There is but one Physician
Can cure a sin-sick soul.
Next door to death He found me,
And snatched me from the grave,
To tell to all around me,
His wondrous pow’r to save.

The worst of all diseases
Is light, compared with sin;
On ev'ry part it seizes,
But rages most within:
'Tis palsy, plague and fever
And madness, all combined;
And none but a believer
The least relief can find.

From men great skill professing
I thought a cure to gain;
But this proved more distressing,
And added to my pain;
Some said that nothing ailed me;
Some gave me up for lost;
Thus ev'ry refuge failed me,
And all my hopes were crossed.

At length this great Physician –
How matchless is His grace –
Accepted my petition
And undertook my case;
First gave me sight to view Him.
For sin my eyes had sealed;
Then bade me look unto Him;
I looked, and I was healed.

A dying, risen Jesus,
Seen by the eye of faith,
At once from danger frees us,
And saves the soul from death:
Come then to this Physician,
His help He'll freely give.
He makes no hard condition,
'Tis only: Look and live.

John Newton

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