

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



September 2024

Vol 89 • No 9

Contents

On the Sea of Time	163
A Soldier's Conversion:	
2. Now on the Lord's Side	166
For Junior Readers:	
Storm into Calm	168
The French and the Psalms	170
Conversion (2)	171
John Bunyan:	
6. His Books	174
For Younger Readers:	
Inside the Cold Cottage	177
Thoughts on a Robbery	178
Scripture and Catechism Exercises:	
UK Prizes and Awards for 2023-24	179
Looking Around Us	179

Cover picture: Elstow, near Bedford, where John Bunyan was born. See page 174.

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; tel: 0141 332 9283; e-mail: william.campbell@fpcoffice.org. The subscription year ends in December, and subscriptions should be sent in January each year for the following 12 months. Subscription rates for 2024, including postage, are: *Free Presbyterian Magazine* £35.60 (£2.75 per copy); *Young People's Magazine* £20.60 (£1.40 per copy); both magazines £54.00. 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 89

September 2024

Number 9

On the Sea of Time

We are all making our way through life; we can think of this as sailing over the sea of time. But where are we going? Whatever else can be said, we are sailing towards eternity, the never-ending state in which we will exist for ever and ever.

But the port we surely *want* to reach is heaven. It is described in the Bible as a beautiful city: “The building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones (Revelation 21:18,19). Yes, we are to think of heaven as composed of all kinds of beautiful materials.

What is more, if we get there, we will be happy for ever; all our needs will be supplied; indeed we will not be conscious of having any needs. We are told about those who reach the city: “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Revelation 21:4). Everyone who gets to heaven will only be conscious of constant, perfect happiness.

On the other hand, that chapter goes on to tell us that the “unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death” (verse 8). To reach heaven we must be holy, perfectly holy, when we reach there. No one who is still sinning, who has any stain of sin left, can enter heaven. Surely we need to take our voyage over the sea of time seriously, and we dare not think lightly about where our destination will be. To miss heaven is to land in hell. So, if we do not reach heaven, we will never experience any happiness at all.

How can we get safely to the city of heaven? The first thing is that we need a chart. And the chart must be within our reach. It makes no sense at all for the captain of a ship to have a chart, but to keep it stored away in a cupboard and never to look at it. It is the same for the chart we need on our voyage over the sea of time.

The chart is the Bible, and we need to be looking at it – reading it – again and again. To have our Bible stowed away in a cupboard and never to look at it will do us no good. It will not help us to get safely across the sea of time and bring us at last into the port of heaven. We need to keep reading the Bible and to do so regularly.

We need to recognise that we are sinners, and the Bible will clearly teach us that solemn fact. It says, for instance, “All have sinned” (Romans 3:23). This applies to everyone setting out on the voyage across the sea of time. It is something that should concern each of us. But the good news that the Bible brings is that “the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world” (1 John 4:14) – to save sinners in all parts of the world.

No matter where sinners are on the sea of time, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has been appointed as a Saviour for them. So, to put the matter in plainer language, wherever a sinner is in this wide world, that person is to go to Jesus for salvation. That is what God the Father has appointed, and it is the will of God that we should go to Jesus for salvation. If we do so, we will reach the port of heaven in the end; we cannot go permanently off course on our voyage there.

On the sea of time, there are many reefs, and there is a great danger that the ship in which you are sailing may strike one of these rocks and you may sink to the bottom of the sea and drown. If that happens, you will obviously never get to the port of heaven. To avoid such a disaster, you need to keep your chart close to hand, not in a cupboard, from which you never bring it out. In other words, as you sail across the sea of time, you need to keep your Bible handy and make good use of it.

You need, as has already been emphasised, to keep reading your Bible, so that you will be warned about the dangers that you will face as you go on through life, and there are lots of such dangers. There are temptations to do what is wrong; there are the bad examples that we see in others, and there is the fact that everyone’s “heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9).

There is the danger of trying to do without God on our voyage across the sea of time and of trying to do without religion altogether – following a secular lifestyle. And there is the danger of looking for salvation apart from Christ – in particular, trusting in ourselves or turning to some false religion. But there is no “salvation in any other” (Acts 4:12) – no salvation except in Christ. These are all reefs that we need to look out for, and we need to watch the chart to pick up warnings about these dangers.

The Bible warns us that “there is a way which *seemeth* right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Proverbs 14:12). People may

assume that they are following a right course as they go on their voyage and that they will reach heaven safely; but the end of their journey may be to smash into a reef and never reach the port of heaven. How wrong people can be if they sail across a sea without paying proper attention to the chart of that area! But how much more dangerous it is to cross the sea of time without paying serious attention to the Bible!

When Jesus Christ saves sinners, He saves them completely; He will never abandon them in the middle of the sea of time. The chart tells us that “He is able . . . to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by [Christ], seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25). Christ saves sinners to the uttermost, no matter how sinful they are – no matter how far away from the port of heaven – and all who are converted will be brought safely there at last.

That is not only because He died for them at Calvary; it is also because He is making continual intercession for them; He is continually presenting their petitions to the Father as they ask for His care and keeping, because of all that He did for them in this world. His work for them here was perfect, and so is His work for them in heaven as they cross the sea of time from the point at which they first trusted in Christ.

As believers sail on towards heaven, they must not allow themselves to drift. They must keep their eyes on Christ; they must not become careless. If they do become careless, there is a real danger that they will hit a reef and suffer damage.

At the entry to any harbour, you will probably expect to see a light, perhaps even a lighthouse. Christ is calling His people to keep looking to Him – that is, to keep believing on Him. He is calling them: “Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else” (Isaiah 45:22). And if believers keep their eyes on Christ, who revealed Himself as the Light of the world, they are sure to get safely into the harbour of heaven.

What a welcome they will receive when they reach that harbour! Christ will say to them: “Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord” (Matthew 25:20,23). Let that be a comfort to them when they meet with storms on the sea of time.

And those who have not yet begun to look to Christ – who have not trusted in Him for salvation – they are called to look to Him now, to trust in Him at once as the Light of the world, the light at the entrance to the harbour of heaven. Jesus Christ is saying to sinners everywhere: “Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else”.

A Soldier's Conversion

2. Now on the Lord's Side

Last month's article in this series, told by the son of a godly widow, described his earlier life. His conversion is described in this final article, which ends with some comments on the soldier's account. His story comes, with editing, from Archibald Alexander's excellent book, *Thoughts on Religious Experience*, and the comments from Alexander himself. For a long time the soldier neglected the ways of God. He was now coming to church but not feeling the authority of God's law.

Things went on in this way for nearly a year. At the close of this time I began to feel myself strongly tempted by the evil one, though at the time I did not blame it on this unseen spirit. Probably it is better to say – to use the language I would have then used – I was uneasy, discontented, extracting more of the bitter than the sweet from the things and circumstances around me. In other words, I was extremely miserable. I could experience no joy from the things of earth, and of the joys of heaven I knew nothing.

But thanks to a good and righteous God, He was pleased to bring me into this state to show me that all my hopes of happiness from earthly things were vain. I was in the act of throwing myself on the settee, when I carelessly took up the Bible, which happened to be lying near me. The first chapter I opened at was 1 Peter 1. But how shall I describe my feelings the moment I cast my eyes upon its pages?

My heart was melted into deep sorrow for sin. I felt the love of God shed abroad in my whole being. I was convinced that I had the Holy Spirit at work within me. I was moved to tears at His goodness. I wept like a child. I felt that I had been a sinner. My lack of thankfulness in the past came like a flood upon me. I was overcome with thanks for His mercy. It completely possessed my whole being.

I rejoiced in the thought that, though I had been a wanderer from Him, yet He was a good and kind Saviour and was ready to forgive me all the injuries I had done Him. I could indeed say, with deep conviction, as I read the passage which presented itself to me: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead".

Indeed, this whole chapter seemed to be perfectly adapted to my state. I remember in particular that the eighth verse was specially pleasing to me: "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory".

Another remarkable matter connected with this display of God's goodness was how wonderfully I felt I was able to understand this chapter of the Word

of God. Not only could I see things in the gospel that I never saw before, but I felt my whole character changed. I felt not only a strong love to God, but to everybody around me. I could have wept on the bosom of my bitterest enemy. O the joys of that moment!

But, alas, how vain and powerless are man's attempts unless the Holy Spirit of God remains with him! I recollect very well that I thought I would go and see the minister and tell him what had happened. But not acting on the suggestion immediately, I neglected it altogether.

The fear of the ridicule of the world was too strong for my faith, and I felt that I could not yet give up the world and declare myself on the Lord's side. But still He would not let me go. He would not give me up. Shortly afterwards the army removed me to another station, and here I can see the all-gracious design of providence in this change.

I was by this means thrown into the company of several godly officers. One in particular, I valued very highly. And one evening he talked with me on the goodness of God in twice leading him back, from clear relapses into sin. That very evening he was seized with the fever that, in five days, carried him to his grave.

He was of great service to me, under God's blessing, in confirming me in my resolves to give up the world and cleave to the Lord. So indeed were all the others. It is enough to say that, not many months after I came among them, I openly proclaimed myself on the Lord's side, and sealed the covenant by partaking of the Lord's Supper. It is an additional source of happiness for me to state that it was not long afterwards that my wife also renounced the world and joined me in the race set before us in the gospel.

Comments by Archibald Alexander. In the case before us, one ray of divine light at once convinced the man that God really exists, and that the Christian religion is from God. The next ray of light opened to the astonished view of the man the awful sinfulness of his own character, and showed him that he was in the hands of an angry God, from whose terrors he could not escape. The third cast a clear light on the way of salvation, filling his soul with joy unspeakable.

The man supposed that he was taught the way of salvation by the Holy Spirit, without any help from the outward teaching of the Word. But I believe that within the knowledge of this individual there was enough acquaintance with Christ and His mediatorial work that, in line with His usual method, the Spirit took of the things of Christ and showed them to him.

Now that inspiration has ceased, the Spirit makes no new revelations to human beings. Yet He often brings into their memories truths which they have once known, but which they may have long forgotten (according to

John 14:6; see also 16:8-14). One single gospel text may be made the object of saving faith.

Such cases show that the Holy Spirit, who operates where and when He wills, may be at work on the minds of those whom we would least suspect to be thus visited. Here a thoughtless cadet at a military academy falls into unbelief of the Bible – indeed, atheism – and is surrounded by companions in the same state of mind. Providence throws a book that aims to prove the truth of Christianity in his way; and while he reads, a new light darts into his mind – not from the book, but from God. And this unbelieving young man becomes at last a preacher of that very gospel which he aimed to destroy. To God be all the glory!

The writer of the account was a young officer in the American army who seemed likely to get on well. It is a pleasing thing to find that men, who by their work are commonly far from the usual means of grace, are not beyond the reach of the God's mercy. This is especially so when neither our army or navy have a suitable number of godly chaplains; only very few seem to care about this. When soldiers and sailors embrace religion, they are commonly remarkable for their piety. The fact is that they are exposed to so much ridicule and opposition that, unless their religious impressions are strong and their purposes are firmly fixed, they would not be able to stand up against the opposing current.

This narrative will at least encourage the hearts of godly parents, who have sons in dangerous situations, not to despair of their conversion. It should encourage them to be constant in their prayers that God would graciously follow them with the strivings of His Holy Spirit, and in due time bring them to the foot of the cross.

And may it not be a good opportunity to remind all praying people that in the variety of their prayers, the young men in our army and navy should not be forgotten? As long as such forces are needed, they who are to defend our country, by sea and land, should not be forgotten in the prayers of Christians and of the Church.

For Junior Readers

Storm into Calm

Have you heard of Rev John Brown of Haddington? He was a godly minister in Scotland in the late 1700s. Haddington, where his church was, is a town near Edinburgh. In those days there were no bridges crossing the Firth of Forth, the stretch of water separating Edinburgh from the County

of Fife, on the north side of the Firth. Instead ferry boats carried the people who wanted to travel.

On a summer's day, a big fair was held in Burntisland, a town on the north side of the Firth. Many people were catching ferries across to this event. Nearly 200 people crowded onto one large ferry boat. Most of them were worldly people looking for entertainment at the fair and many were also very rough. But among them was John Brown, who had some business to attend to on the other side.

As soon as the crowd realised that there was a minister on board they started insulting and annoying him. Others cursed and swore at him, some of them also bumping into him. Brown quietly and meekly put up with all this annoyance, at the same time praying silently for his persecutors.

Then, suddenly, when the boat was nearly halfway across, a terrible storm arose. Rain fell in torrents and a wild wind blew fiercely, striking terror into all the passengers. Even the boatmen were afraid and warned the passengers to prepare for the worst, as they were sure the ferry was going to sink.

Now the attitude of the passengers began to change. They started gathering around the minister, recognising that he would be a man of prayer and so would have power with God. From all parts of the boat, voices were heard crying out, "O sir, pray! Pray for us!" Someone else asked him: "Pray for me; I am a great sinner, but please pray for me!"

And the good man did pray. He lifted up his face and his hands to heaven and prayed most earnestly. Before his prayer was ended, the words of Psalm 107:29 were fulfilled before their eyes:

"The storm is changed into a calm at His command and will;

So that the waves, which raged before, now quiet are and still."

Very soon the boat arrived safely at the landing place. The passengers were about to rush away to the fair, but Brown, speaking with authority, called them to stop and to gather round him. It was a voice they felt they would never forget, and nearly all the passengers were prepared to listen.

Standing on a big log and looking earnestly at the people, Brown began to appeal to their hearts and consciences. The power of the Lord was present to bless his words and several souls were awakened to feel they were sinners, brought to repent of their sins, and were saved.

God is the same still. He still answers prayer. Will you not seek Him now? Will you not pray earnestly for the salvation of your own soul? The Bible tells you: "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near; let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon". *J van Kralingen*

The French and the Psalms

In the French Wars of Religion, between 1562 and 1598, the Psalms were the Huguenot hymnbook (the French Protestants were called Huguenots). While singing a psalm they repelled the charge of their enemies or delivered the assault against them. In the army of Condé, a French Protestant leader, the sentries went to their post, and left it when they had finished their spell of duty, to the chant of psalms; Psalm 3 ("Lord, how are they increased that trouble me!") gave the signal of danger.

Day after day the thanksgiving for victory was raised in Psalm 122 ("I was glad when they said unto me . . .") from the walls of Huguenot strongholds, like Montauban or La Rochelle, as the soldiers of the League, their enemies, drew off their beaten forces.

In his later years, John Calvin's colleague in Geneva was Theodore Beza (1519-1605), the writer of the French metrical version of Psalm 68, which was the battle-song of the Huguenots. A taste for worldly culture, a passion for poetry, worldly success and fame, had weakened the impression of the religious training he had received when he was young. A dangerous illness revived his former feelings. Escaping from "the bondage of Egypt", as he called his earlier life, he took refuge with Calvin at Geneva. In 1548, when he, for the first time, attended a Protestant service, the congregation was singing Psalm 91:

"He that doth in the secret place of the most High reside,
Under the shade of Him that is th'Almighty shall abide."

He never forgot the effect of the words. They supported him in all the difficulties of his later life; they conquered his fears, and gave him courage to meet every danger. To the work of translating the Psalms into French verse, and into Latin prose and Latin verse, Beza devoted the best years of his life. His translation of the Psalms into French verse, completing the work of Clément Marot, was published at Lyons in 1562.

During sleepless nights, Beza used to repeat to himself the morning song of Eastern Christians, the favourite psalm of Chrysostom, a prominent leader in the early Church: "O God, Thou art my God; early will I seek Thee . . ." (Ps 63). When Beza died as a veteran of the Reformation, on 13 October 1605, it was with a text from the Psalms in an old version upon his lips, "If Thou, Lord, wilt be extreme to mark what is done amiss, O Lord, who may abide it?" (Ps 130:3).

Nor was it only in the shock of battle or the glow of victory that the power of the Psalms was used. Nothing but the Psalms have been as powerful in defeat, disaster, or humiliation. Colporteurs risked their lives in carrying, to

the farthest corners of Protestant France, copies of Marot's version of the Psalms, printed so small that they could be readily concealed in the clothes of refugees.

Thus it was that the Psalms sustained the courage of the martyrs in the midst of torture, and of those who were condemned to the living death of rowing the galleys. The meetings of the banned and persecuted Huguenots were summoned by the singing of a psalm. In woods and caves, in dungeons, in exile in America, the Psalms still sounded from the lips of the sturdy Protestants.

Adapted from *Cheering Words* for 1994

Conversion (2)

Robert Murray M'Cheyne

Last month's part of this sermon was the introduction. It came from a book of M'Cheyne's preaching, called *Additional Remains*, and has been edited. It was preached in 1835 in Dunipace, in central Scotland, while he was assistant to the minister in Larbert. This section gives the first of two main points.

Psalm 40:1-3. *I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God; many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord.*

1. The difficulty of conversion. So difficult and super-human is the work of turning a soul from sin and Satan to God that only God can do it. Accordingly, in our text, every part of the process is referred to Him alone: "*He brought me up out of an horrible pit*"; *He* took me "out of the miry clay"; *He* "set my feet upon a rock"; *He* "established my goings; and *He* put a new song in my mouth". So God, and God alone, is the author of conversion. Only He who created man at first can create the sinner anew in Christ Jesus unto good works. And we shall see clearly the reason of this by going over the parts of the work described here.

The first deliverance is shown us in the words: "*He brought me up out of an horrible pit*", and the corresponding blessing to that is: "*He set my feet upon a rock*". A more hopeless situation can hardly be imagined than that of being placed, like Joseph, in a pit, and especially a horrible pit, or a pit of destruction, as the Psalmist calls it. You are hemmed in on every side by damp and gloomy walls, with scarcely an outlet into the open air. In vain you struggle to clamber up to the fresh air of the open day; you are a prisoner in the earth, occupying a pit of horrors.

Such is your state if you are unconverted; you are lying in a pit of destruction; you are dead while you live – buried alive, as it were; dead in trespasses and sins, while you yet walk in them. You cannot possibly climb up to the light of day and the fresh atmosphere above you, for the pit in which you are is indeed your prison. Unless you are drawn up from it by the cords of grace, it will bring you into that yawning pit which the Bible says is bottomless.

Such is your state if you are unconverted. You are under the curse, for “cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them”. And you have never continued in any of these things, doing them from the heart, as unto the Lord – and only that can be called doing them.

You have never savingly believed on the Son of God, and therefore you are “condemned already” – you have never been lifted out of the pit of condemnation. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; but he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” – that is, it is never lifted off him.

You will never exchange the pit of wrath and destruction, in which you are by nature, until you leave it for the pit of eternal wrath. Since this horrible pit represents the state of wrath and condemnation in which we are by nature, how impossible is it that we can free ourselves from it! To escape from a prison of earthly kings is a hard and daring enterprise, but who shall break loose from the prison of the eternal God? Who shall clamber up from the pit of condemnation in which He confines the soul?

Who can work out a pardon for past offences? Who can blot out the sin of his past life? Look back on your lives, spent in forgetfulness of God – in desires and deeds contrary to God. Then, remembering that He is infinitely just, that He cannot lie, that He cannot change His mind, say if you think it is something easy, or possible, to deliver yourselves from the fearful pit in which you are now reserved for His wrath.

But if you cannot save yourself from the pit and set your feet upon a rock, much less can you free yourself from the miry clay and establish your own goings. The pit of destruction represents the wrath you are under by nature; the miry clay represents the corruption you are in by nature. To be standing in a dry pit, as Joseph was, is bad enough; but how hopeless and wretched you are when standing in miry clay!

To be under condemnation for past sins, one would think, should be enough misery; but your case is far more desperate, for you are also sinking daily under the power of present corruptions. Every struggle which you make to get up, from your wretched condition, only makes you sink deeper in the

miry clay; and every hour you remain where you are, you are sinking deeper; it becomes more hopeless for you ever to get out.

How truly does the growth of sinful habits in you resemble the sinking of your feet in miry clay! Which of your habits does not grow more established by continuing it? How does the habit of swearing grow upon a man until he is absolutely its slave! And so with those more refined sins whose seat is in the heart. Every day gives them new power over the soul; every new indulgence binds your feet more than ever in the evil way. And though you may – indeed, in the course of nature, you must – change your lusts, your passions and desires, yet every change is like freeing one foot from the miry clay, only to set it down in another spot to sink again.

The undoneness of an unconverted heart – what imagination is bold enough to paint all its horrors? Look in on your own hearts, you who are unchanged in heart and life; and if the Spirit of grace may but use the passage we are speaking of to convince you this day of your sin, you shall see how truly there is within you a dark chamber of imagery – a depth of spiritual wretchedness. You are unable either to forgive yourself, or to make your heart new – either to set your feet on a rock, or to establish your goings. Your condition can be described only by such ideas as those of a horrible pit and sinking in miry clay.

A third step in conversion you cannot take for yourself is to put a new song in your mouth. A song is a sign of gladness. So James says, “Is any merry? Let him sing psalms.” And the spoilers of Jerusalem, when they would mock the sorrows of the exiled Israelites, required of them mirth, saying, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion”. But to sing a new song, even praise to our God, is a privilege of the believer alone. To be glad at heart, whilst a holy God is before one’s thoughts, is a privilege only of him whose feet are settled on the rock, Christ.

It is true the unconverted world have a mirth of their own, and they too can sing a song of gladness. But here lies the difference: They can be glad only when God is not in any of their thoughts – only when a veil of oblivion is cast over the realities of death and judgement. Keep away all serious thought of these things, and they can revel – like Belshazzar and his thousand lords, when they drank wine and praised the gods of gold and of silver.

But unveil to their eyes the grand realities of a holy and everywhere-present God – of death at the door, and after death the judgement. Then their appearance is changed (as was Belshazzar’s when the mysterious hand wrote on the wall) and their thoughts trouble them, so that the joints of their loins are loosed and their knees smite one against another.

But to the believer, a holy God is the very subject of his song: “Praise to

my God"; and the views of death and judgement do not break in upon this divine melody. On his dying bed he may begin the song which shall be finished only when he wakes up in glory. Now what unconverted man has the power to put this supernatural song in his mouth, this strange joy in his heart? Gladness cannot be forced, and least of all the Christian's gladness. If you are unforgiven, unjustified – still at enmity with God – how can you raise one note of praise to Him?

In Revelation 14, where the redeemed sing, as it were, a new song before the throne and before the four beasts and the elders, it is added: "And no man could learn that song, but the hundred and forty and four thousand which were redeemed from the earth". None but new creatures can learn this new song. Angels cannot join in it, for it is the hymn of the redeemed – of those who were sinners, and have been made new. And if angels cannot, how much less can unconverted, unredeemed sinners join in that eternal harmony.

In every way then, how unspeakably hard a work conversion is! How impossible with man! But with God all things are possible. He has provided the rock, Christ; and His ear is not heavy that it should not hear, if we but cry; His arm is not shortened that it cannot save, if only we will inquire of Him for this.

John Bunyan

6. His Books

Rev George B Macdonald

This is the final part of a paper given to last year's Youth Conference in New Zealand. Last month's section spoke about Bunyan as a prisoner. He was put in prison because he had been preaching the gospel.

The published writer. We noted earlier in this paper that two books had an effect on Bunyan after his marriage. Perhaps Bunyan long remembered the blessing that one can receive from books that have been published.

Bunyan was not only a writer, but a published writer. Others, many others, read his writings. They are still read today. It is a testimony to the enduring value of Bunyan's writings that even my local public library in Windsor, New South Wales, stocks a copy of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. John Bunyan is perhaps the only Puritan writer with a book in this council-run public lending library.

The Pilgrim's Progress is Bunyan's most famous work. It is written as an allegory. A dictionary defines an allegory as "a story, poem or picture which can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning, typically a moral or

political one". Interestingly, when I looked up the definition of an allegory, the example cited was as follows: "*Pilgrim's Progress* is an allegory of the spiritual journey". It is, perhaps, the most famous allegory in the English language. It is said that C H Spurgeon had such a high regard for *The Pilgrim's Progress* that he read it at least once a year.

As you may know, *The Pilgrim's Progress* details the journey of Christian from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City of heaven. On his journey, the pilgrim meets many dangers and suffers and learns along the way. He meets friend and foe. At last, crossing the River of Death he enters the gates and passes into the City along with his companion Hopeful.

Other very useful and important published works of John Bunyan are: *The Holy War*, *The Pharisee and the Publican* and *The Jerusalem Sinner Saved*. The full title of *The Holy War* is, *The Holy War made by Shaddai upon Diabolus, for the regaining of the metropolis of the world, or, The losing and taking again of the Town of Mansoul*. It is clear from Bunyan's writings that he had a clear grasp of the way of salvation. He understood well the evil of sin, the deceitfulness of the human heart and the solemnities of the world to come.

In *The Pharisee and the Publican* he writes with insight and depth on the righteousness that justifies; this is a doctrine he also stresses in other writings. In this book he notes, "As to the justification of the sinner, there must be a righteousness for God; I say, for the sinner and for God. For the sinner to be clothed with, and for God to look upon, that He may, for the sake thereof in a way of justice, bless the sinner with forgiveness of sins. For forgiveness of sins is the next thing that followeth upon the appearance of the sinner before God in the righteousness of Christ." Bunyan's writings have been very helpful to many souls. This reminds us that those who are gifted for writing can have a helpful legacy that lives on after they are long dead.

When researching material for this paper, I was interested to find that, in a three-volume set of Bunyan's *Works*, there are poems and writings from his pen I had not been aware of before. He even has a book titled, *A Book for Boys and Girls – Divine Emblems, or Temporal Things Spiritualised*.

Here is an example of a poem from that book:

Upon the Swallow

This pretty bird, O how she flies and sings,
But could she do so if she had not wings?
Her wings bespeak my faith, her songs my peace;
When I believe and sing, my doubtings cease.

In a conclusion to *Grace Abounding*, Bunyan shows he was no stranger to the pilgrim fight against inward corruptions. He writes: "I find to this day

seven abominations in my heart:

1. An inclining to unbelief,
2. Suddenly to forget the love and mercy Christ manifests,
3. A leaning to the works of the law,
4. Wanderings and coldness in prayer,
5. To forget to watch for what I pray for,
6. Aptness to murmur because I have no more, and yet ready to abuse what I have, and
7. I can do none of those things which God commands me without my corruptions thrusting themselves in.

“These things I continually see and feel, and am afflicted and oppressed with, yet the wisdom of God does order them for my good:

1. They make me abhor myself;
2. They keep me from trusting my heart;
3. They convince me of the insufficiency of all inherent righteousness [that is, all righteousness coming from myself].
4. They show me the necessity of fleeing to Jesus;
5. They press me to pray unto God;
6. They show me the need I have to watch and be sober; and
7. They provoke me to pray unto God, through Christ, to help me and carry me through the world.”

When we see the different styles of writing Bunyan could turn his mind to, and couple that with his gifted preaching, we can conclude that God greatly blessed and helped him. His gifts were for the good of the Church.

But, like Christian, there came a time when Bunyan came to the River of Death and entered the Celestial City. No more preaching and writing. No more bonds and imprisonment.

Interestingly, the end came when Bunyan was a free man and engaged in the work of ministry. A son who had fallen out of favour with his father engaged Bunyan to seek to make reconciliation. Having done so, he rode back to London, but having already been feverish and unwell, he was drenched on the ride on horseback to the city. He was ill for about ten days and expressed a great desire to depart and be with Christ. He died and was buried in Bunhill Fields, London. An ornate stone carving marks his grave. This was a later addition in 1862 and marks the high regard the Victorians had for the author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. The simple inscription reads: “John Bunyan Author of the Pilgrims Progress”. It indicates that he died on 31 August 1688, aged 60.

Conclusion. John Bunyan was a sinner saved by grace, through faith in Christ. He was a pilgrim – one who experienced the challenges of the

Christian pilgrim, following the narrow way to life eternal. He was a preacher – one who delighted to preach Christ fully and freely. He was a prisoner – one who suffered much for conscience’ sake. He was a writer – one whose published works are still read and valued.

I conclude with a quote from *The Pilgrim’s Progress* of the scene when Christian and Hopeful are seen no more as they enter the Celestial City: “Now just as the gates were opened to let in the men, I looked in after them, and, behold, the City shone like the sun; the streets also were paved with gold, and in them walked many men, with crowns on their heads, palms in their hands, and golden harps to sing praises withal. There were also of them that had wings, and they answered one another without intermission [interruption], saying, ‘Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord’. And after that, they shut up the gates; which, when I had seen, I wished myself among them.”

For Younger Readers

Inside the Cold Cottage

It was a stormy day in winter and it was snowing outside. The minister in Jedburgh, a town in Scotland, went out to visit John. John was one of the people who came to his church, though perhaps this old man was no longer able to go to church.

The minister opened the door of the house and walked into the room where John was sitting. John was poor, and living in a little cottage which needed a lot of work done to it to make it comfortable. Snow was drifting in under the door and also coming through the roof.

So John could not have been very warm, because there was very little coal burning in the fireplace. But the old man was happy. He must have been cold, but he had his Bible on his knees.

The minister asked him: “What are you doing today, John?”

John’s answer was: “I am just sitting under His shadow with great delight”. He meant that God was speaking to him through the words of the Bible, and so John was very happy. Even although his body could not have been very warm, he was not really noticing it. The words of his Bible were probably telling him of God’s care over him and that made him feel happy.

Ask God to make you know that He can speak to you through the words of the Bible. Ask Him to speak to you through the Bible.

Thoughts on a Robbery

Matthew Henry was a well-known minister who lived over 300 years ago. He is still well known today, because of the huge commentary he wrote, a set of books explaining the Bible. It is usually printed in six large volumes, though my set, an older one, is in eight volumes.

Henry spent most of his ministry in Chester, but he lived and preached in Hackney, London, for the last few years of his life. Every Saturday when he was in Hackney, he used to give a lecture explaining the Catechism, and on Tuesdays he went into London to do the same thing. On one such Tuesday he was walking home after giving his lecture and had just about half a mile to go to reach Hackney, when robbers caught up with him. They stole about 10 or 11 shillings from him, about half a week's pay for a working man.

He wanted God to bless this unpleasant experience to him. So he wrote down four lessons he could learn from the incident. Henry's comments, slightly edited, are each followed by some further points which may be profitable to us.

1. *"What reason I have to be thankful to God that, having travelled so much, yet I was never robbed before now."* Henry thinks of God and His goodness in watching over him so often in the past. He wants to think positively about God's care; he has no wish to think that God did not take proper care of him on the one occasion when he was robbed. We too should appreciate all God's goodness to us; we should ask God to keep us from complaining when things turn out in a way we find disappointing.

2. *"What an abundance of evil this love of money is the root of (see 1 Timothy 6:10), when four men risked their lives and souls for so little money!"* (This was a time when people could be hanged for stealing.) We need to be careful that we do not lose our soul for the sake of a little money, or even for a lot. Our soul is far more valuable than we are ready to realise.

3. *"See the power of Satan working in the children of disobedience"* – people whose character is best described by *disobedience* to God and His commandments. Satan is far more powerful and successful than we realise.

4. *"Worldly wealth is a vain thing. How soon we may be stripped of it! How loose we ought to sit to it!"* We may easily lose whatever money and property we have. So we should not be too anxious to hang on to it. The best riches are the blessings that God gives us for our souls.

Scripture and Catechism Exercises

UK Prizes and Awards for 2023-24

Senior Section

Prizes: *Aberdeen:* Julia Macleod. *Barnoldswick:* Bethan Middleton. *Dingwall:* Catherine Campbell. *Edinburgh:* Fraser Campbell. *Inverness:* Jenna Campbell, Callum A Morrison. *London:* Sarah Munns. *North Tolsta:* Uilleam Morrison.

Awards: *Llanelli:* Carys Cran. *Southampton:* Chloe, Jonathon and Lydia Wilkins.

Intermediate Section

Prizes. *Barnoldswick:* Sam van Essen. *Edinburgh:* Beth Dickie. *Glasgow:* Violet Marr. *Inverness:* Murray Dickie, Anna McSeveney, James Maton. *Llanelli:* Carwyn Cran.

Awards. *Dingwall:* D A MacColl. *Edinburgh:* Anna Cameron-Macintosh. *Inverness:* Susanna Jane Campbell.

Junior Section

Prizes: *Aberdeen:* Cassia Soni. *Barnoldswick:* Alexia van Essen. *Beaulieu:* Hudson MacLean. *Dingwall:* Neil Campbell, Iain MacColl. *Edinburgh:* Darcy Essen, Alice Hicklin. *London:* Ernest Campbell. *North Tolsta:* Rebecca Morrison. *North Uist:* Katie MacDonald

Awards: *Aberdeen:* Kenneth Macleod. *Barnoldswick:* Susie Middleton. *Beaulieu:* Rebekka Fraser. *Edinburgh:* Alex Cameron-Mackintosh. *Glasgow:* Evan Marr. *Halkirk:* Angus Hymers-Mackintosh. *Inverness:* Campbell Dickie. *London:* Andrew Macleod.

Upper Primary Section

Prizes: *Dingwall:* Heather Campbell. *Edinburgh:* Julia Cameron-Mackintosh, Joella Esson, Leah Hicklin. *North Harris:* Finlay Jardine. *Portree:* Murdo Macraill.

Awards: *Dingwall:* Mairi MacColl. *Glasgow:* Joel Marr. *London:* Benjamin and Daniel Macleod. *North Tolsta:* James Morrison.

Lower Primary Section

Awards: *Aberdeen:* Philip and Kate Macleod. *Dingwall:* Charlotte MacColl. *Edinburgh:* Samuel and James Dickie, Teddy and Jessica Esson, Matthew Hicklin, Genevieve MacLean. *Inverness:* Grace Campbell, Molly, Emily and Alfie Campbell, Harvey and Rose Dickie. *London:* Lydia and William Campbell, Peter Macleod. *North Harris:* Margaret and George Jardine. *Southampton:* Benjy Wilkins. *Staffin:* Stornoway: Murdo Maclean.

Looking Around Us

Prayer or Reality

Joe Biden is the present President of the United States. His term of office lasts until January 2025, and the election of his successor will take place in November of this year. He had expected to stand then for re-election, but he felt obliged to stand down because a lot of people felt that he was too old and that his brain was not as sharp as it used to be.

While the discussion was going on, a prominent actor stated, “We can put our heads in the sand and pray for a miracle in November, or we can speak the truth”. In this man’s opinion, the truth was that Biden was not fit to run in the election for president, for another term of four years, and that he should

stand down. The alternative was for people to put their heads in the sand; that is, that they would not face up to reality about Biden's condition, but let him continue as a candidate. They might pray for a miracle if they really wanted to, but clearly, in this actor's foolish way of thinking, it was perfectly useless to pray.

Now, many miracles took place in Bible times. Jesus, far more than anyone else, performed very many miracles, by His own power. And the Apostles worked miracles in the name of Jesus, but all by His authority, not their own. Also some of the Old Testament prophets worked miracles, in God's name. But such miracles no longer take place; they ended after the last part of the Bible was written. We do not need to see miracles today because we can turn up our Bibles and read about the great works of God, including His miracles. All these miracles were intended to demonstrate the great power of God and also the power of the Son of God while He was on this earth.

Yet God has not lost His power though He no longer works miracles. He has control over everything that happens in the ordinary course of His providence. And He hears the prayers of His people when they ask Him to bring about, for instance, something that they believe they need or what someone else needs or what His Church needs. The answer to these prayers will not be a miracle; it will happen because God has control over everything that takes place in this world.

The actor was suggesting that miracles are impossible. They are not. God could work a miracle at any time if He wished to, but that is not the way He now works. If, for example, somebody sees that a huge congregation needs to be fed, they should not ask God to work a miracle, as Jesus did after He had preached all day and all the people were very hungry. But the person who is concerned about such a congregation should pray for food to be provided – perhaps by making people who have enough money willing to pay for all the needed food.

We have plenty encouragement in the Bible to pray for what we need. To pray is definitely not to hide one's head in the sand, to turn away from reality and from one's responsibility. To pray is what we should always be ready to do; we are called to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17), to be ready to pray at all times. It is what God's children will seek to do. May we be among them, not least in always being ready to pray!

Price £1.40