

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 90

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Number 7

Ready for Death?

A woman from the United Kingdom has become the oldest person in the world, at the age of 115 years and 252 days. She is Ethel Caterham, who lives in a care home in Lightwater, Surrey, and succeeded a Brazilian woman called Inah Canabarro Lucas, who previously was the world's oldest person. This woman passed away at the end of April, aged 116. Ethel Caterham was born on 21 August 1909 and is the last Briton still alive since the time when Edward VII was King.

All human beings are mortal, no matter how long they live. Everyone knows this, but by no means everyone takes this fact seriously. Yet God in His kindness repeatedly draws our attention to the fact of our mortality – He shows that other people die, one after another. But how few ask themselves how they should prepare for death!

One of the vivid illustrations in Scripture, of the fact that death is certain, begins at Isaiah 40:6: “All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field; the grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass”.

This is what we should expect: to pass away from this world. That is what God warned Adam about: “Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen 2:17). If Adam and Eve would sin, they would die. Not only would their soul be separated from their body, but they would become spiritually dead; they would no longer be able to love God or to trust in Him; they would no longer be able to do anything that was truly good, that was properly free from sin. What is more, once they would sin, they would become liable to eternal death – to endless punishment in hell.

And Adam did sin, in spite of the warning that God gave him about eating the forbidden fruit, from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That warning was what Satan questioned at first, when he spoke to Eve; it was what he then denied – as he tempted her to sin. Eve disbelieved what God had said; she then ate the fruit, and she was followed in her sin by Adam.

Because of their sin, they became mortal, leading to the sentence being

pronounced by God Himself: "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen 3:19). It is a sentence which all mankind, with very few exceptions such as Enoch and Elijah, have come under.

So we are all to say, I am a sinner, and I must die at the time which God has chosen. So we should then tell ourselves: I must not think that I will live for a long time; indeed I cannot be sure that I will live for one more year, or one more day, or even one more moment.

Yet in the early ages of this world, people lived for much longer than 115 or 116 years. Adam, for instance, lived for 930 years. But the life of everyone alive today will be much, much shorter than Adam's. So we should ask, What should I then do? And we should ask another question, Am I ready for death? And a further question is, How can I prepare for death?

We may learn a great deal if we consider what we are told in the Bible about the jailer in Philippi. Paul and Silas had been preaching the gospel there. They were arrested and brought before the magistrates of the city. The magistrates directed the jailer "to keep them safely". He did so and "*thrust* them into the inner prison". The word "*thrust*" suggests violence, as if he *threw* them in. And then he "made their feet fast [or, secure] in the stocks". Paul and Silas could not have been at all comfortable. Yet these two servants of God were not at all annoyed; even "at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God".

Then there was an earthquake, which shook open all the doors of the prison and the stocks that kept the prisoners in their places. And it wakened the jailer. Earthquakes, like everything else, are under God's control. This earthquake, in particular, was brought about by God's power because He had a purpose of mercy towards the jailer, who was no doubt a complete heathen; he knew nothing about how a sinner was to be saved from his sin and be prepared to enter heaven. Indeed, he was ready to take away his own life and thrust himself into a lost eternity; he assumed that the prisoners would have fled now that the doors were open.

But Paul said to the jailer: "Do thyself no harm". Paul was telling the jailer not to kill himself. He must not thrust himself into a lost eternity. In fact, it was his duty to seek for salvation. But Paul's words apply to us today also; we must do no harm to our souls by going on in sin; we must not continue on the way that leads to everlasting destruction. We must seek salvation in the way that God has appointed. For any of us to neglect salvation is to do oneself tremendous harm.

The jailer, no doubt impressed with the authority that God gave to Paul, asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" God was beginning to influence the jailer in the right direction.

In reply, Paul and Silas told him: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” – that is, his *household*. But the jailer needed to hear more than that; so the Apostles did not stop there. They went on to teach him some of the truths of the gospel, and to speak “unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house”.

Paul and Silas would have spoken to the jailer and his family about Jesus: that He is the Son of God, that He came into this world, that He went about doing good, that He suffered and died in the place of sinners, that He rose from the dead and ascended to heaven, from where He gives repentance and forgiveness of sins to sinners. The result was that the jailer and his family believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; they trusted in Him for salvation.

The Holy Spirit was applying to their souls what Paul and Silas were teaching. As they heard the gospel, they were born again; their dead souls were made spiritually alive so that they became able and willing to believe in Christ. (What is said here about the jailer and his family is to be found in Acts 16:23-32. Some more details are given in the following verses).

The jailer and his family did not delay; that very night they received the gospel. They did not say, as Felix did, that they would hear the Apostles again – at some other time – about this matter. Are some readers promising themselves that they will seek for salvation at some time in the far-distant future? Everyone can be sure that they will not live till they are 930.

But some may presume that they will be able to seek the Lord Jesus, and salvation through Him, when they see death approaching. However unwell a person may be, he or she may think they will get better, and put off seeking salvation one more time. Or they may be so hardened in sin and unbelief that they may refuse to pay any serious attention to the needs of their souls, even although their life is almost over.

How we need to pray with Moses, the man of God: “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom” (Psalm 90:12). Moses was 120 when he died, even older than anyone who is alive today. Yet he thought it useful to have some sense of how long we may live.

But how will we number our days? We should say, I cannot be sure of living for even one more day; so I ought to prepare at once for death and for the eternity that lies beyond death. I must seek for Christ and salvation through Him. I must, like the jailer and his family in Philippi, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. I must trust in Him as the One who came into the world to save sinners. And I must do so at once because there is no time to waste. Let me then plead with God, for Christ’s sake, to draw me to Himself – not only so that I may be brought to heaven at last, but also so that I may serve God and enjoy His blessing for the rest of my life in this world.

Prayer: a Duty and a Privilege (2)

Rev W A Weale

This is the second section of a paper given at the Youth Conference in 2024. Last month's article answered the question, Who is it that prays?

2. Why is it necessary to pray? If God already knows what our desires and needs are, why do we need to pray? In a sermon on "Secret Prayer", Thomas Boston states: Prayer "is not necessary in regard of merit, as if we could procure heaven by it. The only ground of eternal life in the mansions of bliss is the righteousness of a crucified Redeemer. Beggars pay no debts, but confess their insufficiency, saying with the prophet, 'We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from Thy precepts and from Thy judgements' (Daniel 9:5)."

Boston then goes on to give six reasons why secret prayer is necessary:

1. *Because of God's command.* By a plain command He requires it; and that command binds it on us as a necessary duty. So to neglect it is directly to break the command of the great God and Lawgiver. And to make conscience of it is a necessary and proper act of obedience to God's will.

2. *To give God the glory of knowing everything and being present everywhere.* When we pray to God the Father, who is in secret, we plainly declare that we believe He knows and sees all things, that the darkness and the light are alike to Him; and that He is witnesses and inspects all our actions, and will call us to account for all our thoughts, words and actions, which are well known to Him.

3. *To show our sincerity,* that we do not pray so that we will be seen by men; that our motives are not showing off and vain-glory, but that they arise from a regard to God's command, and a sincere desire to serve God. Yet indeed not all who pray in secret are sincere; for, alas, men may take great care in this duty and yet are far from being sincere Christians, or accepted by God in their prayers.

4. *Because no one knows our situation as well as ourselves.* So, though the head of the family prays at family worship, we ought to pray by ourselves, in order to make known our particular situation and needs to God. This is what no one else can know, and we are to ask for such blessings and mercies from Him that we stand in need of and that suit our circumstances.

5. *Because, if we know our own hearts,* we must have something we need to say to the Lord. It is not at all proper to say before others what we ought to say in prayer both in confession of sin and in pleading for mercies. Hence the spouse says in the Song of Solomon: "Come, my Beloved, let us go forth

unto the field: let us lodge in the villages. Let us get up early to the vineyards, Let us see if the vine flourish, whether the tender grape appear, and the pomegranates bud forth: there will I give thee my loves” (7:11,12).

6. *Because our needs continually recur*, including daily and hourly temptations, that may call for prayer, when it is not the time for family prayer. Who is so well supplied, both as to temporal and spiritual blessings, as to have no need to ask for supplies from above? Man is a poor, needy creature in all respects; as a creature he lives on God’s kindness in providence, and as a Christian on the grace that is in Christ Jesus. So he must every day apply to a throne of grace for necessary supplies in both providence and grace. As we are daily surrounded with temptations, or have no strength to resist or repel them, we must fetch strength from God in Christ by prayer, lest we fall and be overcome by the temptations in our way.

Boston concludes, Thus it appears from these reasons, that prayer is a necessary duty for all. And surely all who have tasted that the Lord is gracious will make conscience of this important and useful exercise.

Thomas Brooks, in his excellent work entitled, *The Privy Key of Heaven*, lists “Twenty arguments for Closet Prayer”. Among these are: The most eminent saints prayed in secret; Christ prayed in secret; secret duties shall have open rewards; God shows Himself most in private; our lifetime is the only time for this; secret prayer is the most soul enriching of duties; Christ is much delighted by it; it is the Christian’s meat and drink in difficulties; God is omnipresent; the times call for this; God has given special marks of favour in secret prayer, and Satan is a great enemy to it. This book by Brooks is highly recommended.

John Welsh: a Man of Prayer

9. The End of a Godly Life

John Welsh was a noted minister in Ayr for five years, but he was expelled from Scotland for his faithfulness to Christ when King James VI was trying to mould the Church according to his own unscriptural ideas. He arrived in Bordeaux, in France, at the end of 1606. There Welsh learned sufficient French to be able to preach and became a minister in more than one town in France, the last of which was St Jean d’Angely. His preaching there, it is said, “was much blessed with success”. This is the last article in the series.

May 1621 saw St Jean d’Angely under siege by the French army. King Louis XIII himself arrived at the end of the month to take command. St Jean d’Angely was one of the towns of France which some time earlier

had been assigned to the Protestants, but in 1620 the French Government had made illegal demands on them, demands to which an Assembly held in La Rochelle refused to submit. St Jean d'Angely was among the towns which supported this decision – hence the siege, for the Government totally rejected the attitude of the town.

St Jean d'Angely had no reasonable hope of holding out indefinitely, but they did at least get better terms when they surrendered than they would otherwise have obtained. During the siege, Welsh himself narrowly escaped death when a musket ball passed through the bed he was lying on. And, while the townspeople held out, Welsh gave them all the encouragement he could, even on one occasion using his hat to supply a gunner with gunpowder.

After the surrender some of his friends tried to persuade Welsh that he should not appear in public on the Sabbath. They felt that to hold public Protestant worship so near the King and his court would give offence; it might even put his life in danger. Welsh was not in the habit of deferring so easily to earthly kings and went on with the service.

After some time, the Duke of Espernon appeared along with some soldiers, all sent by the King. Recognising from his clothes that the Duke was a man of some rank, he asked the people to make way for them and give them seats so that they might listen to the Word of God. Whether they were overwhelmed by Welsh's authority or felt it unwise to risk a disturbance by arresting him there and then, they all sat down and listened, before leading him away at the end of the service to answer to the King.

The King angrily demanded why Welsh dared to preach heresy when he himself was so near at hand. "Sir," replied Welsh, not in the slightest overawed, "if you did right, you yourself would come and hear me preach, and you would make all France hear me likewise, for I preach not as those men whom you are accustomed to hear.

"My preaching differs from theirs in these two points: first, I preach that you must be saved by the death and merits of Jesus Christ and not your own, and I am sure your conscience tells you that your good works will never merit heaven for you. Next, I preach that as you are King of France you are under the authority and command of no man on earth. Those men whom you usually hear make you subject to the Pope of Rome, which I will never do."

No doubt Welsh's last point was highly attractive to the French King's ears, and he told Welsh, "Well, well, you will be my minister". The more is the pity that he was not more serious in making this statement. Although, contrary to the terms of surrender, Louis commanded St Jean d'Angely to be razed to the ground, he instructed his captain to look after "his minister" and to provide wagons to carry his stuff to La Rochelle if he wanted.

To La Rochelle Welsh did indeed go, but in these disturbed days he could not think of staying there for long. He decided to make for Holland, wishing once more to see John Forbes, his former companion in resisting the overreach of King James in Scotland. Forbes had settled in the Dutch town of Middelburg. Unwell as Welsh was, it must have been an enjoyable time which he spent with his old friend.

Welsh's health was now too poor for him to look for a charge in Holland. His doctor advised that his only hope of recovery was to return home to breathe his native air. Welsh petitioned King James for the necessary permission, but it was refused. Welsh might, however, come to London "to be dealt with". When Welsh arrived in London, the King sent the Dean of Winchester to negotiate with him. Some general approval of the present arrangements in the Scottish Church would have been enough, however superficial his words might be. Welsh refused; duty was always dearer to him than life. So permission to return to Scotland was refused.

At last, through the influence of some of her relations, Mrs Welsh was able to meet the King. He asked who her father had been. "John Knox", she told him.

"Knox and Welsh," exclaimed the King, "the devil never made such a match as that!"

"It's right like, Sir," she answered, "for we never asked his advice." She urged the King to allow her husband to return to his native air.

"Give him his native air," the King exclaimed with further irreverence, "give him the devil!"

"Give that to your hungry courtiers!" she answered.

At last James told her that her request would be granted provided she would persuade him to submit to the bishops.

She then held up her apron to the King and said, with that self-possession for which her father had been so noted, "Please your Majesty, I had rather receive his head here."

Welsh's friends at court pleaded with the King for permission for Welsh to preach in London. This too was refused until James realised that Welsh would not be long spared. Welsh preached once – long and fervently, we are told. He then returned to the place where he was staying and died within two hours. Welsh was buried on 4 April 1622, having reached the age of possibly no more than 54. In that same grave his grandson John, a noted Covenanting minister, was to be laid 57 years later.

When dying, he was so filled with the enjoyment of God that he was sometimes overheard to say in prayer: "Lord, hold Thy hand, it is enough. Thy servant is a clay vessel and can hold no more."

We need not be surprised that someone who was so consistent in seeking communion with God throughout his life should have been granted such a high degree of communion when he was about to pass into glory. Even in London, when he was so weak, he continued to spend a great deal of time in prayer and study. When someone suggested that he should relax his efforts, Welsh replied, "I have my life from God and therefore it should be spent for Him".

"If the joy of the cross is so great," Welsh wrote in one of his books, "what will be that of the crown? If the sufferings of Christ are mixed with consolations so great and superabundant, what will be those of His glories? And if it be the gift of God to suffer for the testimony of His kingdom, how superlative [very great] will be the gift of reigning with Him?"

When Robert Boyd, his longtime friend, heard of Welsh's death, he exclaimed, "He was a man filled with the Holy Ghost, full of zeal, of love, and of an incredible labour and diligence in his station and calling. . . . Blessed for ever be the name of God, who gave him and raised him up to His Church in a time of so much necessity!" What better epitaph could anyone want?

God is still able, to raise up children unto Abraham, even from the stones that lie around us (see Matthew 3:9). May He raise up in our time another John Welsh! Not that we should be satisfied with one great ambassador of the King of heaven, for the world needs multitudes of them. May He then grant such multitudes, and pour out the Holy Spirit in rich measure to accompany their preaching, so that David's plea would at last be completely fulfilled, "Let the whole earth be filled with His glory!"

Children Walking in Truth (3)

J C Ryle

This is another section of a sermon preached to children. It has been edited. Ryle's first point was, "When can it be said that children walk in truth?" That point was covered in the last two issues.

2 John 4. *I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth.*

2. Now I will go on to the second thing I promised to speak of: to try to show you *some of the reasons why John rejoiced to find this lady's children walking in truth*. The text says, "I rejoiced greatly". Now why did he rejoice? There must have been some good reasons. John was not a man to rejoice without some reason. Listen, children, and you shall hear what those reasons were.

(1) For one thing, *John rejoiced because he was a good man himself.*

All good people like to see others walking in truth, as well as themselves. I dare say you have heard how the angels in heaven rejoice when they see one sinner repenting. Some of you, no doubt, have read it in Luke 15. Well, good people are like the angels in this; they are full of love and compassion, and when they see anyone turning away from sin and doing what is right, it makes them feel happy.

Good people find walking in truth so pleasant that they would like everybody else to walk in truth too. They do not wish to keep all this pleasantness to themselves and to go to heaven alone. They want to see all around them loving Jesus Christ and obeying Him – all their relations, all their neighbours, all their old friends, all their young ones, indeed all the world. The more they see walking in truth, the better they are pleased.

Children, John was a good man, and full of love to souls. This was one reason why he rejoiced.

(2) For another thing, *John rejoiced because it is very uncommon to see children walking in truth.*

Children, I am very sorry to tell you there are many bad boys and girls in the world. Too many are careless, thoughtless, self-willed and disobedient. Nobody can rejoice over them. I hear many fathers and mothers complaining about this. I hear many teachers speak of it. I am afraid it is quite true.

There are many children who will not give their minds to anything that is good. They will not do what they are told. They like to be idle and to have their own way. They love playing better than learning. They do things which God says are wicked and wrong and are not ashamed. And all this is very sad to see.

You may be sure that John had found this out, for he was an old man as well as an apostle. He had seen many things. He knew that even the children of good people sometimes turn out very badly. I dare say he remembered Jacob and David, and all the sorrow their families caused them. And no doubt he knew what Solomon says in the book of Proverbs: “Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child”.

So John might well feel it was a special mercy when he saw this lady’s children turning out well, unlike others, but walking in the way they should go. I do not at all wonder that he rejoiced greatly.

(3) For another thing, *John rejoiced because he knew that to walk in truth would make these children really happy in this life.* John was not one of those foolish persons who do not like much religion, and think it makes people unhappy. John knew that the more true religion people have, the more happy they are.

Yet John knew that life is always full of care and trouble. He knew that

the only way to get through life comfortably is to be a real follower and servant of Jesus Christ.

Children, remember what I say this night: If ever you would be happy in this evil world, you must give your hearts to Jesus Christ and follow Him. He says, "My son, give Me thine heart" (Proverbs 23:26). Give Him the entire charge of your souls and ask Him to be your Saviour and your God; then you will be happy. Have no will of your own; try only to please Him; then your life will be pleasant.

Trust all to Christ, and He will undertake to manage all that concerns your soul. Trust in Him at all times. Trust in Him in every condition – in sickness and in health, in youth and in age, in poverty and in plenty, in sorrow and in joy. Trust in Him, and He will be a Shepherd to watch over you, a Guide to lead you, a King to protect you, a Friend to help you in time of need.

Trust in Him, and He Himself says, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee". He will put His Spirit into you and give you a new heart. He will give you power to become a true child of God. He will give you grace to keep down bad tempers, to be no longer selfish, to love others as yourself. He will make your cares lighter, and your work easier. He will comfort you in time of trouble. Christ can make those happy who trust in Him. Christ died to save them, and He ever lives to give them peace.

Children, John was well aware of these things. He had learned them by experience. He saw this lady's children likely to be happy in this world, and no wonder he rejoiced.

The Naval Officer and the Lawyer

One day a woman asked an officer in the Navy to visit her son, a lawyer, who was very seriously ill with tuberculosis (TB). It seems she wanted the officer to speak to her son about his soul. At the first visit, the lawyer was very agitated; it was only because a favourite sister persuaded him that he agreed to meet the officer. He did not want to be with anyone who would speak about death.

The next day, the officer went back to see the lawyer, and the visit went better. The officer was able to set out the gospel plan of salvation to the ill man. The officer showed him that Jesus Christ is fully able to save sinners and that He is altogether willing "to receive every returning prodigal" son. The officer emphasised Christ's ability to save, because He is both God and man. And he stressed Christ's willingness to save sinners, because He had given His life to rescue them from the power of Satan. Then the officer went

away, but this time the lawyer invited him to return as soon as possible, though the officer did not expect to be able to come back for several days.

The lawyer became more ill than ever and sent a messenger to ask the officer to pay him another visit. It was January and there had been a heavy fall of snow, but a pale moon gave enough light for the officer to walk the 20 miles to the lawyer's home, through the snow, arriving at 3 o'clock the next morning. He now found that God had blessed what he had said to the lawyer a few days earlier.

When, later in the morning, the officer went to the lawyer's room, he could see that there had been a change in the patient's spiritual state. Now he welcomed his visitor as a "brother beloved". He listed many sins of his younger years, though it is not always wise for believers to say much about the sins of their past. He also acknowledged God's long-suffering to him – God had spared him while he went on in sin. He spoke of God's grace in arresting him on his downward course to a lost eternity; and he rejoiced in the redemption worked out by Christ, which had been revealed to his soul, so that his sins were now forgiven.

Yet there was one thing that worried the invalid. For some reason, if he did not live for another 10 days, his mother and sisters would be left without any money; but if he survived for these 10 days, they would be well off. The officer advised him to leave all such matters to the wisdom and guidance of God, just as he had trusted God with the concerns of his soul. But the officer added that the doctor did not think that his patient would survive for more than two or three days. But he advised the patient to cast all his care on the Lord, who would order everything well.

The patient answered, "I will trust Him. His will be done." A few hours later, his condition became worse. Everyone thought he was going to die very soon, and he said goodbye to his family. But in fact, he then revived for a short time. At that point, another lawyer came to his room with the necessary paperwork to settle the patient's affairs, and the patient was able to sign the forms. The ten-day delay seems to have been no longer necessary; so all the invalid's affairs were now settled, and he had no need to be concerned about his mother and sisters being left without money.

God had heard his prayer and, 12 hours later, he died. In his last words he said that God had answered all his prayers. He went on: "I die in peace". He believed that the angels of God were coming to take him to heaven, and he advised those watching around his bed: "Trust in Jesus".

One further point is that the lawyer had never given up reading his Bible, however careless he had been in other ways. But he just read it as a chore; he saw it as a duty. Yet, by reading it, he learned something about its

teachings. Yes, it was a great sin to go on in carelessness about his soul, refusing to believe in Jesus. But it was a great help to him, when he was awakened to a sense of his need as a sinner, to know some of the teachings of the Bible.

Do not rest satisfied with reading the Bible. Your main duty is to believe in Christ. But it is also your duty to keep on reading the Bible. Remember Jesus' words, "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of Me" (John 5:39). And try to pray for God's blessing on the Bible as you read.

Praying Tom

Catherine Marsh

This article is reprinted with editing from *The Free Presbyterian Magazine* for February 1913. William Marsh was described by the Editor of the time as "a worthy, evangelical minister of the Church of England". He began his ministry in 1800 in Reading and died in 1864, at the age of 89. Catherine Marsh was his daughter.

William Marsh preached his first sermon on the words, "Behold, the Judge standeth before the door". Shortly afterwards a Christian friend invited him to visit the town of Basingstoke. The friend promised him that he would be able to preach in the parish church. The minister of this parish had been away for some time but he returned unexpectedly that week. He was clearly a man who did not value the true gospel, for when he heard of the arrangement that had been made, he said, "That evangelical young Marsh shall not preach in my church". When Marsh was told the news after he arrived, he received it with his usual calmness; he only replied, "Then I am to be a listener instead of a preacher tomorrow. But I can pray as much as I wish, no man forbidding me." The language of his heart was:

"Ill that God blesses is our good, and unblessed good is ill;
And all is right that seems most wrong, if it be His sweet will".

Christ, His Master, in whom Marsh trusted completely, had otherwise planned that Sabbath's work for him. Early in the morning a messenger came from a minister who had a small church in the town, to say that he had taken ill and that he would be most grateful if Marsh would take the service. Marsh gladly accepted this opportunity and went out to preach the gospel of Christ from the words, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world".

At the end of the sermon he offered to give the congregation an afternoon service. Between the services, the news spread about the town that the young

minister, who had been refused the pulpit of the large church, was to preach again in the small one. People are often inclined to take the side of anyone whom they think has been badly treated, and so many pressed in to hear Marsh that the congregation overflowed until the churchyard was crowded. Even the choir deserted the parish church, in order to show their sympathy with the young minister who had come under the minister's ban.

Among the crowd in the centre aisle there stood a man so noted for his ungodliness and bad language that he was known in Basingstoke as Swearing Tom. He was a leader in sin, and for 17 years he had never entered a church. It was only curiosity that had brought him now. The text was in the Prophecy of Ezekiel: "I will put a new spirit within you" (11:19).

Near the end of the sermon, the preacher quoted the words, "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?" (Luke 11:13). He said that people might have expected the offer in this verse to be made to children, but it was made "simply to those who asked". So there was "nothing then between the worst of men and this most blessed gift from heaven, but to ask for it." He then added, "If the most wicked man in this church would go home and pray that God, for Christ's sake, would give him His Holy Spirit to change his heart, God would hear and answer that man's prayer".

Through God's blessing, these words went straight to Swearing's Tom's heart. "I am the worst man here," he said to himself; "I will go home and pray".

As he went home, he had to pass the pub that he knew so well. But he refused to go in, although his friends were calling him to come in. When he reached home, he threw himself on his knees and tried to pray in the words which he had heard from the pulpit.

The prayer was answered. From that time he was a changed man, and his name of Swearing Tom was soon altered to that of Praying Tom, by which he was known till he died. He placed his leisure time at the disposal of the minister for visits to people who were sick or in other kinds of trouble. He was made a great blessing for more than 50 years in Basingstoke.

Not until, 30 years later, Marsh preached again in this church, did he become aware of the blessed result of that Sabbath sermon. Tom asked if he could speak to him in the vestry and told him the story of his conversion.

Many years later, as Marsh attended, for the last time, a meeting of the British and Foreign Bible Society, someone told him that Praying Tom of Basingstoke was now "Praising Tom", in heaven. He added, "His last hours were blessed indeed, for he died as he had lived, rejoicing in his Saviour".

For Junior Readers

The Captain and the Cabin Boy

Captain Brown lived in the days of sailing ships and his vessel was one of the finest among British ships. He had sailed all round the world trading in various ports. Sadly he was a very rough man and his crew also were hard, rough and used bad language.

This trip was to America, across the Atlantic Ocean. The captain was not feeling well. "Maybe I'll consult one of these American doctors," he thought, "but perhaps the sea breezes will put me to rights." But as the days went on, he felt worse. He was short of breath and dizzy. He had to rest in his cabin and let the first mate take charge of the ship.

He began to think that he might die before reaching America. For the first time he began to wonder what would happen after death. If there was a God, Captain Brown knew that he was not prepared to meet Him, and he began to worry. If he had been ashore, he could have gone to a church or sent for a minister to visit him, or he could have borrowed a Bible from someone. But here, on his own ship, he did not expect there would be a Bible.

When the first mate came to him for orders, the captain asked abruptly, "Has anyone on this ship got a Bible?" The first mate was astonished and just stared, thinking that the older man's mind was disturbed. "I said," he repeated, "Has anyone on this ship got a Bible? Can you not give me a straight answer to a straight question?"

"No, no . . . Sir. . . I don't suppose so," stuttered the first mate in reply. "Go and look," muttered the captain, "and don't come back without one!"

When the crew heard that the captain wanted a Bible they could not believe it and thought it must be a joke. But then one of the men had a sudden thought. "Just a minute," he said, "what about that little new cabin boy, Joe Prescott? I've seen him down among the hammocks reading something."

"Fetch him," barked the first mate, and a moment later he was there, quaking in front of the officer. "I hear you have been seen reading down among the hammocks", the first mate told him. "What do you read?"

"My Bible, Sir."

"I see. Well, fetch your Bible and take it straight to the captain's cabin. Say I sent you, and hurry!"

The boy's face turned white. He was terrified of the captain, but he knew he had to obey. And he had another even worse fear, What if they took his Bible from him? Claspings his precious book he knocked at the cabin door.

It was a weary, breathless voice that spoke and told him to enter.

When Joe got inside, he hardly recognised the ill man. “Who are you?” the captain asked.

“Joe Prescott, Sir, the cabin boy. The first mate told me to bring you my Bible.”

“Ah yes, a Bible! Sit down, boy, sit down. Read me something out of that Bible. . . . I may never reach port.”

Joe thumbed nervously through his Bible. He came at last to John, chapter 3, and read the story of Nicodemus, who wished to see the kingdom of God. He read slowly and distinctly, but the captain’s eyes were closed and he showed no sign of understanding. When he came to verse 16, Joe read it very slowly indeed: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life”.

The Captain opened his eyes and stared. His eyes were fixed on the boy, and he was breathing very fast. “Read it again, boy; read it again,” he whispered. So Joe read it again and again. As he did so, the Holy Spirit blessed that precious verse to his soul. “That’s it,” muttered the captain. “That’s the anchor! That will get me into port.”

So Joe slipped out of the room, full of wonder at the Lord’s goodness and mercy and clutching his precious Bible under his uniform, while the old Captain turned his face toward the Heavenly Harbour! *J van Kralingen*

Youth Conference 2025

Ministers must study the history, geography and culture of the Bible’s people and places so that they can correctly interpret and apply the Scriptures. So our young people need to be familiar with the doctrines of the gospel and the history of the Church, to profit as much as possible from the privileges that they have received. This is one of the main aims of holding an annual Youth Conference.

The Conference took place this year at Strathallan School from April 9 to 11 and was well attended. All enjoyed it. We hope it may have proved a spiritual blessing to those who came. There were five papers as well as a historical tour.

The Conference began with an afternoon paper, on the Wednesday, by Mr Frank Daubney on the Covenanter James Renwick. The paper gave an overview of his life while emphasising specific events relevant to young people. Mr D P Rowland delivered his paper on the Wednesday evening, on the Authorised Version of the Bible (King James Version). The paper covered

the various Reformed translations of the Bible before the Authorised Version. And attention was drawn to the accuracy of this translation.

The Thursday morning paper was on the Preservation of the Church by Rev K D Macleod. The paper was, in a measure, practical as well as historical.

The Rev D Campbell led a historical tour, during which we visited Linlithgow Palace and Blackness Castle. Attention was drawn to the main events of the First and Second Reformations at these two sites. During the trip, members of the public spoke to some of the group, commenting positively on the modest dress of the young ladies and the good behaviour of the group.

Rev R Macleod presented the Thursday evening paper, on Apologetics. He gave an overview of the traditional arguments for the existence of a personal God. His paper was well received. Mr R van Kralingen gave the Friday paper, Lessons from the Life of Joseph. Joseph's godly character was emphasised, and suitable lessons were applied.

The discussions following each paper went well, with the young people contributing freely and asking relevant questions. After the evening sessions, the young people spent part of the evening sitting together singing Psalms.

Mrs N Macleod, Miss M Macaskill, Mrs C Munns and Mrs M Logan acted as housemothers. They must be commended for their hard work preparing for the Conference and faithfully fulfilling their duties. Miss Shona Gillies, a newly retired housemother, attended the conference, and she received a presentation and thanks for her years of service at the end of the Conference.

We expect that next year's conference will again be held at Strathallan, God willing.

(Rev) J B Jardine

For Younger Readers

A Great Sinner

The girl was just 7. She was worried. So she came to see her minister. She told him: "I have been a great sinner all my life".

I am sure she had never murdered anyone. Probably she had never stolen anything from anyone. Could she really have been such a big sinner?

She explained, "I have lived seven years without God and without Christ". So she was not trusting in God and Christ. That was what made her a great sinner.

The minister explained to her the way of salvation, through Jesus Christ, who died for sinners. God gave her faith to trust in Christ and she was saved. She grew up to be a godly woman who trained her own children well.

Looking Around Us

Chinese Bibles

Staff in a charity shop in Chelmsford, Essex, were left “in complete shock” after a Chinese Bible was sold at auction for more than £56 000. Two books bound in leather (not the original binding) made up the Bible; they were handed into the shop and kept in the store downstairs. Eventually the Bible was sent for auction, but was at first valued at just £800.

This translation was made in India by Joshua Marshman, a missionary from England and working in Serampore, near Calcutta. He worked on the Bible with John Lassar, an Armenian Christian who was born in Macau, now part of China. The Bible was first printed in five parts, beginning in 1817; the first part produced contained the books of Moses, Genesis to Deuteronomy.

Other translations followed, notably one by Robert Morrison, a missionary to China, who belonged to the north of England. He was helped by William Milne, from Aberdeenshire, and by a Chinese national from Beijing. Morrison finished his translation of the New Testament in 1813, just before Milne landed in China.

Already, in 1810, Morrison had printed 1000 copies of the Acts of the Apostles. Some of these copies were burned by Roman Catholics, who claimed the translation was heretical because it was made by a Protestant. The next year, Morrison finished a translation of Luke’s Gospel. The Roman Catholic bishop in the district burned about 100 copies, ignoring the fact that, as Paul told Timothy, the Scriptures “are able to make thee wise unto salvation” (2 Timothy 3:15). Yet, in spite of many difficulties, for Satan is always ready to raise up opposition to anything that may damage his kingdom, Morrison finished his translation of the whole Bible in 1821.

Staff at the charity shop in Chelmsford recognised that the copy of the Chinese Bible was valuable, but they did not realise how valuable it was. Yes, it was valuable in terms of what it could fetch when it was sold, but did they recognise the value of its contents for those who can speak Chinese? Do we recognise the value of having the Bible in our own language? Do we recognise the value of having a book which is able to make us wise unto salvation? Let us then make good use of the Bible, reading it, praying over it, and listening, if that is possible, to preaching faithfully based on it.

Since Morrison’s time, other translations of the Bible into Chinese have been made – some better, some less good. At the moment, the Trinitarian Bible Society is working on a Chinese Bible. The New Testament was published in 2023. The Society reports that “the translation of the Old Testament continues to progress well, with the team working on Psalms and Proverbs”.

The TBS have also announced that their new website in Chinese has been published: tbschinesebible.org. They would be glad if people would spread the word about this website and their Chinese translation project, by sharing the website with Chinese speakers.

The Believer's Safety

That man no guard or weapons needs,
Whose heart the blood of Jesus knows;
But safe may pass, if duty leads,
Through burning sands or mountain-snows.

Released from guilt he feels no fear;
Redemption is his shield and tower;
He sees his Saviour always near
To help in every trying hour.

Though I am weak and Satan strong,
And often to assault me tries;
When Jesus is my shield and song,
Abashed the wolf before me flies.

His love possessing I am blest,
Secure whatever change may come;
Whether I go to east or west,
With him I still shall be at home.

If placed beneath the northern pole,
Though winter reigns with rigour there;
His gracious beams would cheer my soul,
And make a spring throughout the year.

Or if the desert's sun-burnt soil,
My lonely dwelling place should prove;
His presence would support my toil,
Whose smile is life, whose voice is love.

John Newton

Price £1.50