

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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What Should We Seek Most?

Jim Clyburn is a member of the House of Representatives, one of the two chambers of the United States “parliament”. He was asked if he thought former President Joe Biden should have stepped aside, in 2024, from running again for a second term as president. Clyburn did not want to answer the question directly; after all, at 84, he was a few years *older* than Biden, who was showing some signs of old age, such as a degree of memory loss.

He said that his children and grandchildren did not care about Biden's decision as to whether or not he should continue in the race for president. Instead, he claimed, “They're going to ask me, ‘What did you do to make sure I got a better life?’ That's all I'm concentrating on.” Clearly Clyburn was entirely focused on the things of this world, especially on what he could do to make the United States and its citizens – including his children and grandchildren – more prosperous. He wanted people to be able to earn more money, to be able to buy more things and to have better holidays, for instance.

But this life is not everything; there is another world beyond this one. Our time in this world will come to an end. And then what? The body ought then to be laid in the grave, to lie there until the day of the resurrection. At death the soul will either be brought to heaven to enjoy all the blessedness that Jesus Christ has provided for those who trust in Him for salvation, or – if this person did not believe on Jesus as the Saviour from sin – it will be sent away to the awfulness of hell.

What is this life for? One answer is: it is an opportunity to prepare for eternity. The Prophet Amos told the people of Israel: “Prepare to meet thy God” (Amos 4:12). What did he mean by “prepare”? He meant that they must do all that was necessary so that they would be ready to meet God at the time of their death.

Because they were sinners, the Israelites had to offer sacrifices. But what good could it do them? The sacrifices could teach them that they needed a *substitute*, one who could suffer instead of them, because of their sins. The teaching of the prophets was meant to lead the Israelites to look forward to the coming of a Substitute, who really could take away sin. The substitute,

of course, was the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, who took human nature, so that in His human nature He could suffer and die in the place of sinners.

We should think of Abraham, whom God commanded to offer up his son Isaac. When Abraham was ready to do so, God told him he did not need to go any further; Abraham had shown wonderful obedience to a very difficult command. But was there to be no sacrifice? Yes, God provided a sacrifice.

Abraham looked around and he saw a ram caught in a thicket – an area of trees and bushes growing thickly together. We are told that “Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son” (Genesis 22:13); the ram became a substitute for Isaac.

The ram being offered up was a picture of Jesus Christ suffering instead of every sinner who will believe in Him. We deserve to suffer eternal death because of our sins; we deserve to suffer for ever in hell. That is a very serious and solemn message.

Yet there is good news, very good news: Christ suffered and died in the place of sinners, so that they would not have to suffer because of their sins. But how do we benefit from what Christ did? Remember the question the jailer in Philippi asked Paul and Silas: “What must I do to be saved?” And remember their answer: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:30,31). The jailer believed; he trusted in Christ and what He had done for sinners. And the message for sinners today is just the same as it was then, almost 2000 years ago: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ”.

Many people in the USA are very well provided for; they have plenty food and clothes; they have good houses and everything they could reasonably want. Of course, not all Americans are well provided for. But however well off individuals or families may be, or however poor, Christ's words hold true: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness” (Matthew 6:33). These are the things that are to be considered *first*, the things that are most important for us.

People might say that they must get food for themselves and their families before they can think about religious things and what is beyond death. It is so easy for people to put off considering the needs of their souls and where they will spend eternity. But remember the word, *first*, in the words of Jesus that have just been quoted.

There are other things that people need that are, more or less, necessary for life. Jesus had just referred to what we eat, what we drink and the clothes we put on, and He added, “All these things shall be added unto you”. He was making a promise. He was saying that if we sincerely seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness – if we seek first the salvation that He has provided – He will give us all the other things that we really need in this life.

So no one should worry that they will really lose out by seeking first the salvation of their soul – seeking a place in God’s kingdom before everything else in the world.

When a young man called James became a member of his church – professing that, by grace, he had found a place in God’s kingdom, that he had trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ – his father was not at all pleased. He told him: “James, you should first get yourself established in a good trade, and then think of, and decide about, religion”.

James replied, “Father, Christ advises me differently; He says, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God”. A parent’s advice should be listened to respectfully, but what God says is far more important than what a mere human being will say. What God says can never be wrong. Remember always that Christ, who is the Son of God, is always right in what He says to us through the Bible.

Jim Clyburn seems to be altogether focused on the here and now. Yet we should all seek to do what we can to help others; we are to love our neighbour as ourselves. If, by God’s grace, we have entered His kingdom, we should seek to promote the interests of that kingdom.

God calls some men to spend their lives preaching the gospel but, whatever else other people may do in the interests of God’s kingdom, they must pray for it. They are to pray that the Scriptures would be blessed to those who read them, that the preaching of God’s Word could be applied to the souls of those who listen to it, and that the witness of God’s children would be used for the good of those who are still outside the kingdom.

Our wish should be that God’s kingdom would be extended in every direction, that sinners would be converted in their multitudes, and that God’s children would become more and more holy. He is able to do so, even in an age as ungodly as ours. Nothing is too hard for Him. He works by the Holy Spirit to apply the truths of the Bible to sinners, bringing them to realise that their sins are serious, that their opposition to God is sinful and that they must give in an account to Him on the Day of judgement. He also works by the Spirit to bring sinners to trust in the Lord Jesus for salvation.

May we all seek first, above everything else, to have treasure in heaven, to have the spiritual blessings that Jesus provides! May we seek this, far above having more and more treasure on earth! Treasure on earth is what politicians want to promote when they call for growth in the economy. That may well be useful, but what good will worldly prosperity do for a sinner if he or she never obtains treasure in heaven? What good will lots of money and possessions do for us, if we do not find Christ and a place in the kingdom of God? So seek “first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness”.

Who Told the Minister?

William Munro was a farmer in Easter Ross. He was recently married, to a godly woman. But, although he lived a decent life outwardly, he had never thought seriously about the state of his soul. He always went to church, but religion had no hold of his heart.

Not long after he married, he was surprised to hear the minister, Daniel Bethune, speaking from the pulpit on Sabbaths about what he had been doing through the week. William found it very strange; he could not imagine how the minister could know what he was doing. It rather annoyed him and he thought about it again and again. Someone must have been telling the minister what he was doing, or so he thought.

But who could it be? After thinking about it for a long time, he came to the conclusion that it could only be his wife – yet he loved her dearly. Some of the things the minister said, no one else could know about except his wife. William was more convinced in blaming his wife because she often called at the minister's manse.

What the farmer took to be the minister describing him and his behaviour went on Sabbath after Sabbath. He very much hated it and believed that everyone in the church was staring at him. At last he could no longer stand it; so he accused his wife of telling the minister all his faults. He told her that it was not a proper thing for her to do; she must stop it at once; otherwise they would have to separate.

She, of course, denied that she had anything to do with the matter. William did not believe her; he still could not understand how it could be anyone else who was informing the minister. He was very displeased with his wife and he felt that it was not at all appropriate for the minister to be telling everybody about him each Sabbath.

As time went on, the farmer began to hear the minister speaking about the working of his corrupt heart. It came across just as clearly as what he took to be the description of his outward actions. It was obvious to him that his wife could know nothing of what went on in his mind. He realised that no one knew anything about his thoughts except himself and God, who knows everything. And yet the preacher was telling him about his thoughts.

William did not know what to say. He now had to look at things very differently. It could not be his wife who was telling the minister what to say; it must be God who was leading him to speak as he did. The truth was that *God* was speaking, through the minister, to the farmer, who now found himself confronted by God alone. He had caught the farmer's attention and roused his conscience.

God's message, at this time and for a while afterwards, was to him one of terror, and William felt himself guilty – self-condemned because of his sin. He could not think of saving himself, or to do anything to contribute to his salvation – that was impossible. Now, if he was to be saved, he could only think of God dealing with him *in mercy*. God's message to him was no longer unmixed condemnation; it also spoke of mercy for the returning sinner.

After William's time of spiritual darkness and conviction of sin, faint rays of light began to break through the gloom in his soul; he began to see that God does show mercy to sinners. Light from heaven broke into his troubled soul, and by God's grace he looked to Christ Jesus as the Saviour of sinners.

We are told that he became a useful elder in Bethune's congregation. Later he moved to another farm, in the nearby district of Kilmuir Easter, where John Porteous was the minister. Munro was distinguished for his godliness and people looked up to him. Those who were open sinners were afraid of him; such was his authority.

Two families worked small plots of land beside his farm. William decided things would work better for him if the two plots of land were made part of his farm. He applied to the owner of the land to bring that about, and the owner agreed. But it was very inconvenient for the two families, although they were provided with ground somewhere else.

But some time afterwards, his conscience began to trouble him for being covetous – wishing to have the two patches of ground, which were not his. It was selfish to take the ground away on which they were growing the food they needed.

William repented of what he had done and confessed his sin to God. He wanted to do something to make up for his selfishness. He brought 15 widows and their families to live on his farm and gave them, till the end of his life, the oatmeal and other things that they needed.

William Munro was naturally kind and, after he was converted, he was even kinder than before. One day, when he was bringing, probably, some food to poor people, a neighbour came into the room. This man was far from being kind. He said that he was afraid that William would leave himself and his family without any money because he was giving so much away. He was afraid too, he said, that this would damage the reputation of true religion.

"Well, friend," William answered, "I often fear that I may bring reproach on the cause of Christ – but not, by any means, in the way you have stated". William knew what was really important about his giving; it was his motive in supporting the poor. Was his motive love to God's command and His glory? If it was, he said, he would never be weary of giving to the poor, and

he would not be afraid of ruining himself and his family. He obviously believed that, if his motive was right, God would provide for him and his family if he became poor himself.

If we are still unconverted, we should seek earnestly that God would turn us from our own ways and make us able and willing to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. But no one should rest satisfied with being a true believer although one should be very thankful for salvation. We should seek to become more and more holy.

William Munro was a godly man, yet he was by no means perfectly holy. No one will be perfectly holy in this life; perfect holiness is for heaven. Yet notice that he did not make human imperfection an excuse for his sin. But notice too how Munro confessed his sin to God, turning to Him again in sincere repentance.

Prayer: a Duty and a Privilege (4)

Rev W A Weale

This is the last section of a paper given at the Youth Conference in 2024. Last month's article began to answer the question, How are we to pray? The answer to this question follows the teaching about prayer given in *The Shorter Catechism*. The answer is continued in this article. The last quotation has been edited.

We come now to the Third Petition: "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven". In this petition we pray, "That God by His grace, would make us able and willing to know, obey, and submit to His will in all things, as the angels do in heaven".

This petition implies: (1) A confession that God's will is not being done on earth. This is clear when we think of all the evil in this world as well as in our own hearts and lives. (2) This petition implies a profession, for no one who is not a Christian is really concerned about God's will. So to make this petition, truly and sincerely, implies that one is a believer – one who is within the family of God. But (3) We have here what is really a petition, for it is asking for grace to be given us so that we may do the will of God.

This petition is the last that has to do with our relationship to God, and so the fourth petition takes to do with what more directly concerns ourselves.

In answer to the question: "What do we pray for in the fourth petition?" we have the answer, "In the fourth petition (which is, Give us this day our daily bread) we pray, That of God's free gift we may receive a competent portion of the good things of this life, and enjoy His blessing with them". This petition has to do with our bodily needs and teaches us that there must

be a daily dependence upon God and that we should be satisfied with what our needs require and that we ought not to crave luxuries.

The fifth petition takes us to our spiritual needs. “In the fifth petition (which is, And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors) we pray, that God, for Christ’s sake, would freely pardon all our sins; which we are the rather encouraged to ask, because by His grace we are enabled from the heart to forgive others”.

Two points are to be noticed here; (1) That our sins are our debts. This is because we fail to give God what we owe Him – that is perfect obedience. This obedience has been given by Jesus Christ, and so we send up petitions in His name, for His obedience must be our hope. So again we are reminded that only believers in the Lord Jesus can truly pray this prayer.

(2) That if we are forgiven, we ought to forgive. The Lord Jesus mentions this in several places in the Gospels. For example, in Luke 17:3,4, He says, “Take heed to yourselves, If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him”.

This takes us to the final petition in this prayer. “In the sixth petition (which is, Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil) we pray that, either God would keep us from being tempted to sin, or support and deliver us when we are tempted”. This petition is different from the previous one in that, while it had to do with the guilt and pardon of sin, this has to do with the power of sin.

It teaches us that, while the guilt of sin is pardoned, the pardoned person is not beyond danger, and so he needs to war against sin. But he also needs to be kept by the power of God. It reminds us of the great tempter, Satan, who is very cunning and has an assortment of bait that he uses to bring God’s people into sin. Not least, Satan uses the corruption within us.

The second part of the petition, “but deliver us from evil”, has been understood by some to refer to the evil one (Satan) but we believe that is too narrow an interpretation for there is evil within us and around us in the world.

It probably implies, as some understand it, a threefold deliverance: (1) deliverance *in* evil, being made able to stand in the evil day; (2) deliverance *under* evil, the need to get out of its power; (3) complete deliverance *from* evil. So we are to pray that God would deliver us in all those ways.

“The conclusion of the Lord’s Prayer (which is, For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, Amen) teaches us to take our encouragement in prayer from God only, and in our prayers to praise Him, ascribing kingdom, power, and glory to Him. And in testimony of our desire, and

assurance to be heard, we say, Amen.” Here, in effect, are the arguments which we are to use when we come to God in prayer. It is saying, Hear, for the kingdom, power and glory are Thine, for Thou art the glorious and almighty King.

It is good to remember that the Lord Jesus taught us to use arguments when we come to plead with God. We have the story, in Luke 11, of the man seeking bread for a friend who came to him at midnight. It is just one example of using arguments. We have the example of Moses in Exodus 32 and of King Asa in 2 Chronicles 14, as well as the woman of Canaan in her persistent plea to Jesus.

Much more could be said about this prayer which Jesus taught to His disciples, but we do well to remember that it is a prayer not to be repeated “parrot fashion” every time that we come to God in prayer, but it forms a most helpful outline to guide us in all our approaches to God.

One of the objections to our using the Lord's Prayer is that it contains no direct reference to a Mediator, and to an answer coming through His merit and intercession. Robert Dabney, in a chapter on Prayer, says, “The answer is that it is an Old Testament prayer: it is intended as such because that dispensation [the Old Testament order of worship] was still standing. When it was about to close, Christ completed this feature of it, by enjoining the use of His Name. (See John 14:13; 15:16; 16:23,24)”.

This quotation from John 16:23,24, is especially apt, “And in that day ye shall ask Me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.”

I would like to conclude this paper with a quotation from the Puritan, Thomas Manton in a sermon on 2 Samuel 7:27: “Prayer is nothing else but the language of faith, love and hope. Here *faith* is a believing of God's being and bounty, that He is willing and able to support us.

“*Love* directs us to the prime fountain of all the good we have and wish to have; it directs us to God's purpose, which is His glory. It regulates all our choices and leads one to these means which tend to the enjoying of God.

“*Hope* is a desire and expectation of the promised blessing. If we have a holy earnestness, a confidence in the power and goodness of God, a sense of need, and hope in His mercy, we cannot but find hope in our hearts.

“Prayer is the language of an upright heart feeling its own needs, and wishing for a supply from God. Prayer is a work of the inner man, not lifting up the voice but the heart to God; it is the yearning of the Spirit: “The Spirit Itself maketh intercession in us, with groanings that cannot be uttered” (Romans 8:26).

James Renwick

2. The Covenanter Background (2)

F R Daubney

Another section of a paper given at this year's Youth Conference. The first part summarised the Covenanter background to Renwick's life. Both James VI and Charles I tried to make the Church in Scotland Episcopalian, under the rule of bishops. The English Parliament turned against Charles I and put him to death. Then Oliver Cromwell ruled over England and Scotland.

After Cromwell's death in 1658 there was a call for rule by kings to be restored. Charles II promised religious toleration and in May 1660 he returned from exile and was crowned in Westminster Abbey in April 1661. But, in spite of all his promises, the new King was no friend of true religion. It became only too evident that his promises and his signing of the Covenants had been motivated only by self-interest.

The Scottish parliament was restored and it soon reversed all the acts of the Covenanting parliaments. The Covenants were declared illegal and anyone renewing them was made subject to heavy penalties. The great charter of Presbyterian Church government – the Act of Parliament of 1592 – was also put aside. The King was declared sovereign in all religious matters and he could now order the affairs of the Church as he pleased. This meant that those who, in conscience, could not submit to the new order would be branded as traitors and rebels.

Episcopacy – government of the Church by bishops – was restored in 1662, and all officeholders were required to renounce the Covenants. James Sharp, who had been minister of Crail, in Fife, changed sides and was made leader of the Church of Scotland and Archbishop of St Andrews. Three of the Covenanting leaders – the Marquis of Argyll, who had placed the crown on the head of King Charles II in Scone; James Guthrie, one of the most prominent of the ministers; and Archibald Johnston of Warriston, clerk to the great Glasgow Assembly of 1638 – were arrested and executed.

About a third of the ministers, 400 in total, refused to accept the changes and were expelled from their pulpits. At first they held meetings in houses, but numbers became too great; so services were held in the open fields. These meetings became known as conventicles, and they very soon spread over the southern part of Scotland.

The situation worsened, with fines being imposed for not attending parish churches. Threats of imprisonment and banishment followed, and troops were sent to put down field meetings by force.

In November 1666, some people who were being harassed by the govern-

ment forces, captured the local dragoon leader – head of some soldiers – and marched towards Edinburgh. They hoped for support from those who opposed Episcopalianism, but that did not happen. And as they turned to go home, they were attacked and routed on the slopes of the Pentland Hills by government forces. Cruel revenge followed. The Pentland Rising, as it came to be called, was the first attempt to rise against the Government's policy of repression; more were to come.

In the following years, the penalty for preaching in the fields was made death, and hearers were threatened with imprisonment and heavy penalties. But the field meetings grew in number and many thousands attended the preaching of the gospel every Lord's Day.

As oppression had not succeeded, the Government tried a different tactic: in 1669 and again in 1672 they issued Declarations of Indulgence, allowing those ministers to return to their charges, who had not given offence to the authorities, but they were subject to strict conditions. Many accepted these indulgences, glad to be able to carry on their normal ministry. Yet others refused to be dictated to by a secular power or to submit to the requirements of a government they saw as wrongly taking the place of Christ, who is the true Head of the Church.

As a result, in 1674 and again in 1675, all the non-complying ministers were publicly declared to be traitors. No one was allowed to give them food or shelter or to help them in any way. Attending conventicles became more and more dangerous, and landowners were held responsible for any tenants who attended. Despite this, in the summer of 1678, 6000 people met for the sacrament of the Lord's Supper on a hill west of Dumfries, with about 3000 going to the Lord's table.

Because of the persecution some people banded together in groups to defend themselves and became quite militant. One of these groups, in May 1679, assassinated James Sharp, leader of the Church in Scotland. A month later, another group successfully fought at Drumclog in Lanarkshire against John Graham of Claverhouse and his dragoons, who had a mission to break up conventicles. Thirty-six of the government troops were killed.

Because of these events, the Government assembled a large force to suppress the Covenanters, who had now gathered a makeshift army to defend themselves. Three weeks after the success at Drumclog, the "Covenanted Army" suffered a resounding defeat at Bothwell Bridge, near Hamilton. Many died, the leaders were executed, and about 1200 people were imprisoned in Greyfriars Churchyard in Edinburgh. The defeat proved a major setback for the Covenanters. Those Presbyterians who refused to obey government demands were now relatively few.

Two valiant men led the continuing resistance to Episcopacy. One was Richard Cameron, an impressive field preacher, called “the Lion of the Covenant”. On the first anniversary of Bothwell Bridge, he and his followers published a declaration at Sanquhar, in Dumfries-shire, disowning Charles II as king because he had broken the covenant and had ruled badly. As representatives of the nation and the Church they also declared war on the King as a “tyrant and a usurper”, an enemy of Christ.

A month later, in July 1680, Cameron was killed at Airds Moss, near Cumnock, when he and 60 followers were tracked down and overwhelmed by government troops. Before the battle, Cameron prayed, “Lord, spare the green and take the ripe”.

The other heroic defender of the faith was Donald Cargill, a fearless preacher outlawed for holding conventicles and declared a traitor. He was one of the Cameronians – so named after Richard Cameron – who embodied their principles in the Sanquar Declaration. In 1680, while preaching, he excommunicated King Charles II and his Roman Catholic brother and heir James, Duke of York, and other leading officers of state.

Ten months later, in July 1681, Cargill was executed with four others at the Mercat Cross of Edinburgh. His last words were: “Farewell all relatives and friends in Christ; farewell acquaintances and earthly enjoyments; farewell reading and preaching, praying and believing, wanderings, reproach and sufferings. Welcome Father, Son and Holy Ghost; into Thy hands I commit my spirit.”

God Training One of His Children

Eli Ashdown was a young man working in a windmill in the South of England. The wind turned the “sails” of the mill, and they turned a large stone to grind grain into flour; that stone lay on top of another fixed stone, and the grain was between them. For some time, there had been very little wind; so the men at the mill were well behind with their work.

But one Sabbath, a strong wind was blowing, which would turn the sails. The head miller thought it was an excellent opportunity to make a lot of flour. He forced Eli to work, though Eli did not want to. He seems to have been already a believer, but he should have resisted doing unnecessary work on the Lord’s Day.

Eli felt pained when he saw his wife and friends going to church, and he felt that millers were the most sinful set of men on the earth. From the windmill where he was working, he could see several other mills, and work was

going on in all of them, except one – and that one was run by a godly man.

About 3 o'clock, Eli knelt down among the sacks and asked God earnestly that he would be delivered from having to work for the rest of that day. He pled that God would cause the wind to go down, so that he would be able to go to church along with God's children. His prayer was answered, but not in the way he expected.

A little later, the head miller came to him and asked, "Do you know Mr Cowper preaches in the village this evening?"

"Yes", Eli answered.

"Go and hear him; don't go to the mill any more today."

Always remember that God "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Ephesians 3:20).

It was clear to Eli that God had heard his prayer. He and his wife went to the service, and the preacher took as his text, "For He [God] shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper" (Psalm 72:12). Eli no doubt thought to himself: I was needy; I had no helper (except God) and I cried to God, who heard me.

Just before Cowper finished his sermon, he seemed to fix his eyes on Eli and said, "You have no family altar [he meant, no family worship] in your house; you do not bow your knees with your wife before going to rest and before going into the world in the morning. You do not ask His blessing on your food before you partake of it."

Yet Eli did pray in a building outside and said a silent grace at mealtimes. Nothing seems to have been said about Eli and his wife reading the Bible together, but that should also be part of family worship.

As the minister spoke, deep conviction entered Eli's heart; he had never felt able to pray out loud in front of his wife or anyone else. He knew he was wrong. But God is able to strengthen those whose duty it is to pray with others. When Eli and his wife came out of church, he told her: "Now we must have a different arrangement at home. We must go on our knees together night and morning before the Lord; also [we must] ask His blessing on our food at meals."

She said, "I have often wanted you to do so but did not like to ask you".

Satan can bring about quite unnecessary fears in the hearts even of God's children to keep them back from doing their duty. But God has His own ways of making His children do His will.

Some time later, on a Sabbath morning, the miller sent Eli a message; he wanted to run the mill as there was a good wind. Eli was just leaving for church when the message came to him. He went to church but offered to run the mill through the night if the head miller wanted him to do so. When he

returned from church, Eli found a message telling him that, if he would not work for his master on a Sabbath, neither would he be working for him on a weekday. He had lost his job.

On the Monday, Eli received a further message telling him that he must leave his accommodation within a month, which was presumably provided by the miller. This was a further worry; he no longer had anywhere to stay.

What could Eli do? He knew that he had a good conscience in the matter; so he committed his situation to God. A week later, he went to a market in Lewes in the hope of finding work. He seems to have been unsuccessful there; so he went on to a market in Brighton. Very soon he met a man whom he knew and told him why he had come. The man sent Eli to an address in Lewes, where he found a miller who gave him work.

God provided work for Eli and also somewhere to stay – when Eli had lost both because he was trying to keep the Sabbath holy. God has said, “Them that honour Me I will honour, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed” (1 Samuel 2:30). It is still true. We can see God was training Eli to live a more consistent life. God was teaching him His commandments and giving him grace to keep them. We should pray, “Teach me, O Lord, the perfect way of Thy precepts divine” (Metrical Psalm 119:33).

For Junior Readers

To Van Diemen's Land

Do you know where Tasmania is? It is the island off the south coast of Australia which used to be called Van Diemen's Land. In the late 1700s and the 1800s, the British government thought it was a good idea to send convicted criminals on ships to what were called “penal colonies” in North America, Australia and Van Diemen's Land. They were taken there in “convict ships”, and the voyage took over three months.

The conditions on the ships were awful, and there were horrible punishments for the men for any sort of bad behaviour. Often the men – the crew as well as the prisoners – became ill. They caught diseases and died on the way. For this reason a Medical Officer or Doctor would be appointed for each ship to treat the sick and to care for them.

One of these medical officers was Dr Colin Browning. He was a minister's son, from Auchtermuchty in Fife. He worked on the convict ships in the 1830s and 1840s. He was a kindly man and was not only attentive to the men's medical needs but he also tried to teach them, as most of the men could not even read. More importantly he believed that spiritual teaching was what the

men needed most of all. As a result he worked like a chaplain among these poor prisoners.

The convict ship *Theresa* left England in March 1845, with over 200 prisoners on board. Dr Browning had been sick himself before leaving, but he said that God gave him strength to address the men at the start of the voyage. This proved to be the beginning of a time of spiritual blessing among the convicts.

Very soon some of the prisoners were awakened spiritually; they were convicted of their sins. As the doctor continued his spiritual duties, God blessed his work, and more of the prisoners became concerned about their souls. He held morning and evening worship with the men and also held meetings for spiritual teaching and prayer.

As well as this, he held classes using Christian writings to help them to read. By the end of the voyage, their reading skills were so good that they were given Bibles to take with them. As a result of the spiritual change in the hearts of these men, they became obedient to all the ship's rules, and no brutal punishments had to be used on that voyage!

Is that not wonderful? The Lord blessed His Word and the Holy Spirit worked in the hearts of these hardened men to bring about an amazing change in the course of their voyage.

And God is still the same. 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*". God also promises that "*He will have mercy upon*" the sinner who seeks Him. Again, the Bible says that the sinner is to "*return to our God, for He will abundantly pardon*".

J van Kralingen

“I Will Pour Water”

1. God Working in Souls

R M M'Cheyne

The first part, as edited, of a sermon preached in Dundee in 1838.

Isaiah 44:3,4. *For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour My Spirit upon thy seed, and My blessing upon thine offspring: and they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses.*

These words describe a time of refreshing. There are no words in the whole Bible that have been oftener in my heart and oftener on my tongue than these, since I began my ministry among you. Yet, although God has never,

from the very first day, left us without some tokens of His presence, He has never fulfilled this promise.

I have taken it up today, in order that we may consider it more fully and plead it more anxiously with God. For, as Samuel Rutherford said, “My record is on high that your heaven would be like two heavens to me; and the salvation of you all [would be] salvation to me”.

1. Who is the author of a work of grace? It is God: “I will pour”. (1.) It is *God who begins a work of anxiety in dead souls*. So it is in Zechariah 12: “I will pour . . . the spirit of grace and of supplications, and they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn”. And the promise is in John 16: “When He is come, He will reprove the world of sin . . . because they believe not on Me.” And so is the passage in Ezekiel 37: “Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live”.

If any of you have been awakened, and made to beat upon your breast, it is God, and God alone, that has done it. If ever we are to see a time of wide-spread concern among your families – children asking their parents, parents asking their children, people asking their ministers, “What must I do to be saved?” If ever we are to see such a time as Jonathan Edwards speaks of, when there was scarcely a single person in the whole town left unconcerned about the great things of the eternal world, God must pour out the Spirit: “I will pour”.

2. It is *God who carries on the work*, leading awakened persons to Christ. “I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh, and . . . whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered” (Joel 2:28,32). And again, in John: “He will reprove the world of righteousness”. If ever we are to see souls flying like a cloud, and like doves, to Jesus Christ – if ever we are to see multitudes of you fleeing to that city of refuge; if ever we are to see parents rejoicing over their children as new-born, husbands rejoicing over their wives, and wives over their husbands – God must pour out the Spirit. He is the author and finisher of a work of grace: “I will pour”.

3. It is *God who enlarges His people*. Do you remember, in Zechariah 4, how the olive trees supplied the golden candlesticks with oil – they emptied the golden oil out of themselves? If there is little oil, the lamps burn dimly; if much oil, the lamps begin to blaze. If ever we are to see you who are children of God greatly enlarged, your hearts filled with joy, your lips filled with praises; if ever we are to see you growing like willows beside the water courses, filled with all the fulness of God – God must pour down His Spirit; He must fulfil His word; for He is the Alpha and Omega, the author and finisher of a work of grace: “I will pour”.

First Lesson. Learn to look beyond ministers for a work of grace. God has given much honour to His ministers, but not the pouring out of the Spirit. He keeps that in His own hand: “I will pour”. It is “not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts”. Alas, we would have little hope if it depended on ministers; for where are our men of might now? God is as able to do it today as He was on the Day of Pentecost; but men are taken up with ministers and not with God.

As long as you look to ministers, God cannot pour; for you would say it came from man. Ah, cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils. One would think we would be humbled in the dust by this time. In how many parts of Scotland has God raised up faithful men, who cease not day and night to warn everyone with tears! Yet the heavens are still like brass, and the earth like iron. Why? Just because your eye is on man, and not on God. Look away from man to Him, and He will pour; and His shall be all the glory.

Second Lesson. Learn to have a good hope of revival in our time.

Third Lesson. Learn that we should pray for it. We often wish to preach to awaken others, but we should be thinking more about *praying* for it. Prayer is more powerful than preaching. It is prayer that gives preaching all its power. I notice that some Christians are very ready to censure ministers and to complain of their preaching, of their coldness, their unfaithfulness. God forbid that I should ever defend unfaithful preaching, or coldness, or deadness, in the ambassador of Christ. May my right hand sooner forget its cunning!

But where lies the blame for unfaithfulness? Where, but in the lack of faithful praying? The hands of Moses would have fallen down, if they had not been held up by His faithful people (see Exodus 17:8-13). Come then, you who wrestle with God, you that climb Jacob's ladder, you that wrestle as Jacob wrestled. Strive with God, that He may fulfil His words, “I will pour”.

For Younger Readers

Better Treasure

An important man gave a Bible to a well-known actress. He told her that there was treasure in the Bible. She thought he was speaking about the teachings of the Bible. So she put it aside and paid no attention to it.

Some time later the actress died. Everything she had was sold, including the Bible. The person who bought it found there was a £500 note in it.

If she had read the Bible, she would have found the money. She might even have found better treasure than the money. She might have found salvation through reading the Bible; she might have found treasure in heaven.

Scripture and Catechism Exercises 2024-25

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Looking Around Us

Why Does the Universe Exist?

Scientists are in a race to discover why our universe exists, a news article on the BBC website tells us. One team are setting up sensitive equipment in a vast cavern, 1500 metres below the surface, in the US state of South Dakota. Protected from the outside world, the equipment is intended to detect tiny changes in sub-atomic particles called neutrinos. The other team are Japanese scientists, who are several years ahead.

The teams hope to solve a scientific problem: the present theory of how the universe came into existence cannot explain the existence of the planets, stars and galaxies. Both teams are building detectors to study neutrinos and anti-neutrinos in the hope of finding answers to their problem.

“We are poised”, one of the scientists says, “to build the detector, that will change our understanding of the universe with instruments that will be deployed by a collaboration of more than 1400 scientists, from 35 countries, who are eager to answer the question of why we exist.”

The article explains the thinking of the scientists: “When the universe was created, two kinds of particles were created: matter – from which stars, planets and everything around us are made – and, in equal amounts, antimatter, matter’s exact opposite. Theoretically the two should have cancelled each other out, leaving nothing but a big burst of energy. And yet, here we . . . are.” Matter does exist. The use of the word “created” at the beginning of this paragraph has no reference to God; it just means *came into existence*. Sadly, far too many scientists working in such areas of study are desperately keen to keep God out of their thinking.

Clearly, scientists do have a problem, as they admit. But if all they are looking for is an explanation of how the universe came into existence, a great deal of money could be saved, and a huge amount of the time of many scientists could be put to a much better use. (We do accept that there may be other good reasons for investigating the neutrino; to discover why particles such as the neutrino and the anti-neutrino do not cancel each other out may indeed be useful and lead to further discoveries.)

All the investigators have to do to find out how the universe came into existence is to find a Bible, open it at Chapter 1 of Genesis and read its first words: “In the beginning *God created* the heaven and the earth”. God made it for His glory. And to find out more about how God is glorified through creation, one should go on reading the Bible.

A scientist from Sussex University told the writer of the BBC article that “the discoveries in store will be ‘transformative’ to our understanding of the universe and humanity’s view of itself”. Indeed there may be discoveries that change the scientific understanding of sub-atomic particles, but can they transform our understanding of the human race?

The basics of what we know about ourselves come from the Bible. There we learn that God created the first human beings, Adam and Eve, as a perfect couple, but that they fell into sin and, as a result, we are all sinners. What we need to know, more than anything else, is what will take us to heaven: to receive what the Bible tells us about Jesus Christ and what He has done for sinners like us, and to trust in Him to deliver us from sin and from a lost eternity.

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