

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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Good Men Speaking of the Bible (1)

Back in the early years of the 1600s, there were people who were not at all satisfied with the Church of England. They wished that it had been made purer after the Reformation, especially when Elizabeth I became Queen, when her intensely Roman Catholic sister Mary had died. These people felt that the Church was not properly reformed; so many unscriptural features had been carried over from Roman Catholic times. Some of these people felt that the right thing for them to do was to leave England, sail across the Atlantic Ocean and settle in America. A lot of people did so, most famously the Pilgrim Fathers, who landed in 1620 in the north-east of what is now the United States. That part of America was called New England.

What I want to do in this article is to take (from a book I have been reading) some examples of what some of the New England ministers said about the uses of the Bible – godly ministers in places like Boston, in the state of Massachusetts. As you read what these good men said, you should try to remember them, so that you can get more good from the Bible as you read it for yourself, as I hope you do. Also, remembering what they said should help you as you listen to someone else reading the Bible.

1. There was a minister in Boston called Josiah Flynt, who compared the Bible to a *trumpet* which is “to be sounded in the ears of sinners” to awaken them to their danger. The danger for the people who were listening to Flynt around 400 years ago was that they would sleep on, careless about the consequences of their sin, and be sent down when they died, to a lost eternity to be punished. They needed to be awakened, and the Bible – including preaching from the Bible – is an instrument to awaken sinners.

Our danger is the same today. Many sinners, even among those who hear good preaching, need to be awakened from the danger of continuing to ignore warnings about the state of their souls. Let us ask God to open the ears of our souls so that we would hear what the Bible says about sin, realise our danger and seek the remedy that is set before us also, in the Bible.

When ministers use the Bible as a trumpet, they are not only to warn about sin, but also to use it as the gospel trumpet. Christ was using the gospel

trumpet when He spoke the words, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). And ministers today blow the gospel trumpet when they repeat these words as they speak on behalf of the Saviour.

2. Another Boston minister, James Allen, spoke of the Bible as a *glass* (an old word for a *mirror* was a *glass*). We look in a mirror and we see ourselves. As we look in the Bible, we should see ourselves to be sinners. It tells us that we always "come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). To glorify God, we must keep all God's commandments perfectly. We must treat Him with perfect respect and worship Him with our whole heart. We are not able to reach that standard; in every degree by which we come short of perfection, we are sinning – as well as when we commit obvious outward sins.

The view that the Bible gives us of ourselves, as sinners, should send us to Christ Jesus asking for forgiveness, because He suffered unto death in the place of sinners. So He is able to forgive all the sins of everyone who believes in Him. Also Jesus kept all God's commandments perfectly; He did not come short in the least degree. So those who believe in Christ are treated, for His sake, as if they had kept all God's commands themselves.

When believers look in the Bible as a mirror, they should recognise themselves, when the Bible says, for instance, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness" (Matthew 5:6). They should see that they have a strong desire after holiness, which is what hungering and thirsting after righteousness means.

3. Though the next minister is not widely known today, he is a little better known than the others. His name was Increase Mather. His first name may seem strange, but perhaps his parents were looking to God, at the time when he was born, for an *increase* of spiritual blessings.

Mather spoke of the Bible as "a gracious *letter* which Christ has sent from heaven, inviting" whoever is willing "to *come* to Him and be saved by Him" (see Matthew 11:28 again). Mather was thinking of God's kindness to lost sinners in sending them a message – or a series of messages – in the Bible. It is in kindness that we are warned about our sins, so that we would not have to suffer the punishment we deserve.

But the message that Mather emphasises is an act of obvious kindness: to tell us that Christ is willing to make us His friends, to reconcile us to Himself, although we have lived as His enemies. "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" (John 3:16). What wonderful love! What wonderful kindness!

This is especially so because the message that Christ has sent to us has

been put in writing. It was not left to be passed on from one generation to another by word of mouth; that is not a method that would readily preserve the accuracy of the Word of God. The Holy Spirit caused all the writers of Scripture to write the Bible books just as God wanted them to be written. There are no mistakes in the Bible. And God has preserved the Bible from mistakes creeping in over the centuries.

4. Another Boston minister was William Adams. He spoke of the Bible as sent, in a kindly way, to sinners to draw, move, teach, correct and unite sinners' hearts to God. This happens when the truths of the Bible are applied by the Holy Spirit.

God does not force sinners to believe on Christ; He makes them, in a kindly way, willing to do so. Christ is the most wonderful of teachers. He works through the Spirit, who so applies the words of Scripture to people, so that they really *learn* what they find there, especially about sin and salvation. The Spirit also *corrects* what they understand wrongly. No matter how unwilling a sinner may be to come to Christ, it is the Spirit that makes a sinner willing to come to Him – to believe on Him, to trust in Him. It is under the influence of the Spirit that sinners are moved to flee from sin and come to Christ.

5. Samuel Willard is the last minister I will mention this month. His church was in a place called Concord, also in Massachusetts. He said that “the *gospel* is the great instrument” that God has appointed “for conversion”. It is God alone who must appoint the way that sinners are to be saved. No one else has the right to do so. He knows the way that is suitable, the way that will prove effective. It is God who has provided a suitable, effective way. He knows everything about what we need. He knows everything; He knows that the gospel – the good news about Christ Jesus coming into the world to save sinners – is the one suitable, effective way to bring about the salvation of a sinner.

What is more, it is God who has the *authority* to prescribe the way for sinners to be saved. He has appointed the gospel, and especially the *preaching* of the gospel, to be the means of salvation. And we should submit to what God has appointed, and made known in the Bible, for the salvation of sinners. We should make every effort to hear the gospel being preached as often as we can, and we should ask God – and keep asking Him – to apply it to us by the Holy Spirit. Let us remember these gospel words: “Him [Christ] hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31).

God willing, I expect to mention, and comment on, some other sayings of New England ministers next month.

The Earl and the Old Farmer

There was at one time a rather odd man who owned a large estate. He was an Earl. It was a time of poor harvests. But the Earl decided to do something to help the farmers on his estate because they did not have much to eat. He sent a letter to each of the farmers telling them that he would be at the Hall, probably his main home, on a certain day.

The Earl told the farmers that he would meet any of them who would come to the Hall before 12 noon. If the farmer could honestly say that he could not afford to pay his rent, the Earl would write off the whole amount the farmer owed; then he would have nothing at all to pay.

One old farmer was very happy to receive the letter, for he had lost a lot of money because of the poor weather, and he had often suffered from illness. He put the Earl's letter in his inner pocket on the day the Earl had mentioned and set off for the Hall. When he arrived at the gates, some other farmers had gathered and were discussing what they should do.

While they talked together, the old farmer looked at his watch and saw it was half past eleven. As there was a long drive to walk over before 12 o'clock, he left the other farmers to go on talking; he made his way to the Hall and showed the letter to the Earl. He was very nice to the farmer. After listening to what the old man had to say, he wrote out a receipt to say that the farmer now owed him nothing at all. He stamped the receipt and handed it to the old man.

The farmer showered his thanks on the Earl, who asked the man to sit down as he wanted to talk with him. While they were talking, the clock struck 12. Then the Earl brought the conversation to an end.

When the farmer got back to the gates, the others gathered around him and asked how he had got on. The old man told them everything and spoke highly of the Earl's kindness. When they heard this and saw the receipt, all the farmers set off for the Hall.

There was a man working for the Earl who met them at the door and pointed to the clock. He said, "Before 12 o'clock was the time appointed by the Earl. It is now too late." It was too late to see the Earl; they could now get no help from him; they still owed him the full amount of their rent.

This story illustrates a very important truth. Think of our position as sinners before God. We owe Him perfect obedience, but we do not give Him perfect obedience. Spiritually we are so poor that we cannot begin to pay off our debt to Him. We might try to do better, but all we are doing might be described as not making our debt increase as much as it otherwise would. We still owe Him everything.

Yet God has sent us a message, in the Bible. He is telling us that He is willing to pay off our debt if we come to Him, believing in Jesus Christ. He is the One who, by His sufferings and death, made it possible for God to pay off all a sinner's debt.

There is a further important point that the story illustrates. Only the old farmer came at the right time; only he had his debt paid off; all the others were too late.

What is the right time to come to God to have our debt paid off – to have our sins forgiven? This is God's answer: "Behold, *now* is the accepted time; behold, *now* is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). He is commanding us to come to Him – in other words, to believe in Him – *at once*. This is "the accepted time", the time that is acceptable. Acceptable to whom? Acceptable to *God*. That is what matters.

If we delay to come, we may find that it is too late to have our debt paid off, like all but one of the farmers. Sinners who delay for too long will pass into eternity with their debt still their own responsibility. So they must suffer for their sins in hell for ever. How terrible!

Again the Bible tells us: "*Today* if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts" (Hebrews 3:7). The danger is that sinners who refuse to go to Him in time, to have their sins forgiven, will find that their hearts become harder and harder; they become more and more resistant to God's call.

They may think that they will yet find it easier to come to Christ – to believe in Him – at some time in the future. Instead, it will be more difficult. Yes, you may find seeking Christ to be difficult. That is because of the hardness – the rebellious unwillingness – of your sinful heart. What you need is that God would draw you to Himself. Ask Him to do so.

Remember something else He is saying to you: "Seek ye the Lord *while* He may be found, call ye upon Him *while* He is near" (Isaiah 55:6). You have only a short time to find Him; He will only be near you for a limited time, and it may be far, far shorter than you expect.

Can the Christian Church Survive?

6. The Answer to This Question

This is the final section of a paper given at the 2025 Youth Conference. Last month's article told about the Reformation in England and the situation of the Churches in England and Scotland under the kings from James VI and I to James II.

Since the Reformation, Christian churches throughout the world have had their ups and downs. Many of them have given in to the unbelief that

denies the authority and reliability of the Bible. Increasing attacks on the Bible have been going on for at least 200 years, and that has left the Churches very weak spiritually. Yet not all of them have given in.

One major reason for this was the increasing acceptance of the theory of evolution, especially from the time that Charles Darwin published his book, *The Origin of Species*, in 1859. It is important to remember here that it is impossible for creatures of one kind to evolve into creatures of another kind – using the word *kind* as it is used in Genesis 1 in the account of the Creation. For example, monkeys cannot evolve into human beings; these are two different kinds. On the other hand, there can be variation within a kind – resulting in the various breeds of dogs, for instance.

If we consider what the likely trends are as we look into the future – and do not take account of what the Bible tells us – we can only assume that the Church is going to dwindle away to nothing. Very many people are no longer coming to church, though this is no wonder when so many congregations have no gospel.

If we look back to the nineteenth-century Free Church of Scotland, we see that, when it began in 1843, it was faithful to the Scriptures. But we can also see that, as the years went by, unbelief was getting a strong grip of the Church, especially among the professors in its theological colleges. These professors passed on their disbelieving views to many of their students. It was in this context that the Free Presbyterian Church separated from the Free Church, in 1893, to become a separate denomination – in an effort to preserve a consistent witness to the truth and, in particular, to the inspiration and reliability of Scripture.

Many of the Churches which do preach the gospel, and try to be scriptural in their way of worship, are also getting smaller. So we may ask again, Can the Christian Church continue? To that question we must give as our answer a resounding, Yes. We give this answer not only because we *want* the Church to continue, and because the world needs the Church to continue for the spiritual good of sinners everywhere. But we say so because that is what the Bible tells us.

We know that Satan is always plotting against the Church, and at times the Lord allows him to have considerable success. That is so today when the Church is weak and Satan's kingdom is very strong. But Jesus promised, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against" the Church (Matthew 16:18). In Bible times, the elders of a city would meet to discuss its affairs at its *gates*; so Jesus was speaking of the devils discussing their plans to oppose Him and His Church in this world. He was assuring His Church that Satan and his followers cannot prevail against it, no matter how intense, purposeful and

long-continued their plotting might be. The Church of God can never be overthrown completely.

So it is *impossible* that the Church will ever dwindle away to nothing; it may get weaker and weaker for a time – even for a long time. As we noticed in an earlier article, Roman Catholic persecution destroyed the Reformation Church in Spain and Italy. But while the true Church may disappear in various parts of the world, it will never be destroyed in *every* part of the world; the Lord is able to preserve it – and He will.

What is more, the Bible shows us that there will yet be days of great gospel blessing in every part of the world. We read that “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9). We are being told in this verse that the time will come when God will be known throughout the world – not only that people will know *about* Him but that they will know Jesus Christ as their Saviour. The waters cover the seabed completely; similarly, large numbers of people in *every* part of the world will know God savingly. And David, even in Old Testament times, was praying, “Let the whole earth be filled with His glory” (Psalm 72:19).

The Bible also records David speaking to the Lord: “They shall fear Thee as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations” (Psalm 72:5); that is, there will always be godly people in every age, at least in some parts of the world. That will always be so until Christ will come the second time to bring everything in this world to an end and to gather the whole Church, of all the ages, into eternal glory. Till that happens, no one need ever be afraid that the Christian Church will disappear from the world. Till then God will cause it to survive.

Besides seeking God for ourselves, how great is the need for prayer that He would pour out His Holy Spirit in connection with the preaching of the gospel and the circulation of the Bible – to bless the truth to vast multitudes of souls everywhere.

The Shoemaker and the Christian

The story is told of a shoemaker who prided himself on being a freethinker; he did not want the Bible to restrict the way he thought. He had plenty of time to think, for as he sat at his last – which supported the shoe he was mending – he could work with his hands and, at the same time, turn over in his mind some of the things he had found in the last book he had read.

Sadly, the shoemaker had been dipping rather deeply into so-called “rationalistic” literature – books written on the false basis that the human

mind is more reliable than the Bible. This sort of reading expanded his ideas of the powers of human wisdom far too much, and it was not long before he was speaking very strongly to his friends against "religion", which he foolishly condemned out of hand as a collection of old wives' tales. There are plenty such books – and internet sites – that bring the same dangers to those who make use of them.

One of his customers was well known to be a Christian, and when he called on the cobbler to pick up a pair of shoes that had been repaired, the cobbler said, "You know, I have been reading a good deal about the origins of Christianity, and it seems to me that the account of Christ and the Christian religion is merely a dressed-up story taken from various heathen writings" – a common statement from those who do not want to believe the Bible.

Now the Christian was a wise man; instead of beginning to argue he simply replied, "I would like to put two simple questions to you. After you have answered them, you can ask me as many questions as you like. But I want you to promise that you will abide by your own answers to my questions and not try to avoid them afterwards."

The shoemaker agreed to this. He felt that he would very soon land the customer in a dilemma by the questions that he would ask. So he agreed to the suggestion, and asked for the two questions.

Here was the first question: "Suppose all men were real Christians, what would be the state of society?"

The cobbler kept thinking for quite a while and then replied, "Well, if all men were really Christians in practice as well as in theory, we should be a happy brotherhood indeed. No one can deny the goodness of real Christian practice. The trouble is that there are so many hypocrites.

"But now let me have your second question. I may get on better with that. You have scored against me with the first one."

The Christian then asked, "Suppose all men were godless, what would then be the state of the world?" The shoemaker seemed more disturbed; he remained silent for a long time. At last he said, "You certainly have beaten me with your questions, for I never saw so plainly the different effects, on society, of Christianity and unbelief. Thank you, I shall think seriously about what you have said."

The result of that afternoon's conversation led the shoemaker to give up his unbelieving companions and the reading of books opposing the Bible. As a result he was brought to know the Lord Jesus Christ as his Saviour and Lord. Then something striking happened.

When the Christian first met the unbelieving shoemaker, he found him sitting on an old dirty chair, surrounded by his children, who were half-

starved, neglected and uncared for. But through Christianity, it was not long before he lived in a better home in a cleaner street, and his wife and children were neatly dressed. His constant happiness was to speak of the Saviour he had found.

Adapted from Cheering Words for 1968

The Great Prison

3. In the Silent Cell

C H Spurgeon

Another section of the first chapter in Spurgeon's book, *Words of Warning for Daily Life*. It has been edited; some explanations have been added in square brackets by the Editor. In last month's section, Spurgeon imagined being in the cell of repentance.

I passed away from that cell, and halted at another; this too had an iron gate of unbelief, as heavy as the last one. I heard the warder coming, and when he opened the door for me it grated horribly on its hinges and disturbed the silence, for this time I was come into the silent cell.

The wretched prisoner confined here said he could not pray. If he could pray, he would be free. He was groaning, crying, sighing, weeping because he could not pray. All he could tell me, as his eyeballs rolled in agony, was this: "I wish to pray, but I cannot; I would plead with God, but I cannot find a word; my guilt has smitten me dumb."

Back he went, and he again refused to speak, but he kept up a sad roaring all the day long. In this place no sound was heard but that of wailing; all was hushed except the dropping of his tears on the cold stone, and his dreary sighs and groans. But do you know, there was a little table in this cell, and on the table lay a key of promise, inscribed with choice words: "The Lord looked down from the height of His sanctuary: from heaven did the Lord behold the earth; to hear the groaning of the prisoner; to loose those that are appointed to death".

Now, thought I, if this man cannot speak, yet God hears his groans. If he cannot plead, God listens to his sighs and sees him all the way from heaven, with this purpose, that He may catch even the faintest whisper of this poor man's broken heart and set him free. Though the soul feels it can neither plead nor pray, yet it has prayed, and it shall prevail. I tried to catch the ear of my poor friend a little while and talked to him, though he would not speak. I reminded him that the Book in his cell contained instances of dumb men whom Jesus had taught to speak, and I told him that Christ was able to make him speak plainly too.

I told the man that, whether he could pray or not, he was told to look at the blood marks over his door [as at the time of the passover in Egypt]. I told him too that the publican was justified by the blood, though he could only cry, "God, be merciful to me a sinner". I pleaded with him to receive the Lord's own testimony, that the Lord Jesus is "able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him," that He waits to be gracious and is a God ready to pardon. But after all, I felt that the Lord alone must loose His prisoners. Gracious God, loose them now!

The Disruption in the Scottish Church

1. Introduction

Rev A W MacColl

The first section of a paper read at the Youth Conference in 2024.

I would like to begin by posing a question. Have you ever wondered why the Church we attend is named *The Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland*? It is called *Presbyterian* because the Church is governed by presbyters – elders and ministers – together. Also included in the title are the words *Church of Scotland*; this is because the Church is descended from the old Church of Scotland, dating back to the Reformation and, very importantly, because the Church's teaching and practice are the same as the Church of Scotland in its best days. To answer that question is the purpose of this paper. In seeking to answer the question we hope it will help give us some understanding of this important part of our witness which dates back to a very significant event in Scottish history.

But why, you might ask, is the word *Free* included? What is the Church free from, and why is this so important that we even have the word in the Church's title? The event just referred to is called the Disruption, and it happened over 180 years ago, in the year 1843. Although it involved a separation from the Established Church of Scotland, the term *Disruption* actually refers to the cutting of the link between the Government and the Church. (*Established* means that the Church of Scotland was supported by the Government. This meant that the payment of its ministers was regulated by laws passed in Parliament.)

Now, the Scotland of the 1840s was very different from the Scotland in which most of us live. It was a nation which was at the very forefront of the great change which is known as the Industrial Revolution. Scotland was changing rapidly into a modern society, and this brought great upheavals. In science, education, books, engineering, transport, medicine, business, farming,

Scottish innovators were at the forefront of the latest developments. This was a fruit of God's blessing on the people of Scotland at this time. These great advances brought great opportunities and wealth, not least because of Scotland's trade with the British Empire and with America.

But it was also a period when there was great poverty and hardship for many people both in the countryside and in the fast-growing towns and cities. Along with this, there was a growing demand for more political participation by ordinary people at a time when only a small percentage of the population had the right to vote. Until this time, political power and wealth had been mostly concentrated in the hands of the upper classes – the aristocracy and landowners. Part of this power actually included the right to “present” a minister to his parish – in other words, to control the appointment of ministers. This system was called “patronage” and it was a main cause of the Disruption of 1843.

But possibly the most significant difference we would notice in Scotland, between the 1840s and today, would be that Victorian Scotland was a much more religious nation than our secularised society. Undoubtedly, there was much irreligion and a great deal of formal and dead religion, and there was also a rapidly-growing Roman Catholic population in the towns and cities. Yet, for all that, Scotland was then a nation where the Christian faith was hugely important and where a high proportion of the population regularly attended public worship.

The largest and most influential body was the Established Church of Scotland. It was Presbyterian in government and Calvinist in doctrine and had a growing Evangelical party who were deeply committed to the spiritual welfare of the Scottish people. The Church's General Assembly had considerable authority, and the office of the ministry was highly regarded in Scottish society. Yet there were profound problems facing the Church of Scotland in the early 1840s.

One was the system of patronage we have already referred to, whereby a small number of influential people were able to control the appointment of ministers. Another difficulty was the existence of a sizeable group within the Established Church who were not Evangelical in religion and many of whom were not godly in their lives. These were called the “Moderates”.

The Moderate ministers liked to think of themselves as cultured gentlemen in society and disliked what they wrongly regarded as the “extreme”, or “enthusiastic”, religion of the Evangelicals. These Moderates had dominated the Church throughout the 1700s and, though they were now in a minority, their influence was still strong. In various ways the Moderates represented a threat to the interests of living godliness and a revived Church.

For Junior Readers

God Answers Prayer

Have you heard of George Müller? He was born in Germany in 1805 and lived a godless life until the Lord began a work of grace in his heart when he was 20 years old. He then moved to England and began a life of preaching, as well as setting up homes for orphan children. He refused to take a salary but depended entirely on the Lord to provide for all his needs.

He was truly a man of prayer. He prayed about everything and expected his prayers to be answered. Throughout his life he had many amazing answers to prayer, often because he needed money and food to provide for the orphans. He also prayed in other times of difficulty.

In those days, people from Britain had to cross the Atlantic in steamships if they wanted to visit Canada or the United States. One year, Müller was going to Canada, as he was booked to take an important meeting in Quebec City. During the voyage, the ship ran into thick fog, and the Captain had to slow right down because it was dangerous to go any faster.

Müller became concerned that, if this continued, they would arrive late and he would miss his meeting. He decided to go and speak to the Captain.

"Captain," he said, "I have come to tell you that I must be in Quebec by Saturday afternoon."

"That is impossible," he replied.

"I have never broken an engagement in 57 years."

"Well, what can I do?" asked the Captain, "I am helpless!"

"Let us go down to the chart room and pray," said Müller.

"Mr Müller, do you know how dense this fog is?"

"My eye is not on the density of the fog, but on the living God, who controls every circumstance of my life," replied Müller.

He then knelt down and prayed that, if it was the Lord's will, He would remove the fog very soon. The Captain then thought he would pray too, but Müller put his hand on his shoulder and told him not to do so.

He had two reasons: first because he thought that the Captain did not actually believe that the Lord would do it; second, because, as he said, "I believe He already has [taken away the fog], and there is no need whatever for you to pray about it! Get up, Captain, and open the door. You will find that the fog is gone!"

The Captain looked out, and the fog had indeed gone! And on the Saturday afternoon, Müller was in Quebec City and able to take his meeting. Was that not wonderful?

What about you? Do you pray for spiritual blessings for yourself and for others? The Bible contains many encouragements to pray, as well as promises that God will answer prayer. *J van Kralingen*

For Younger Readers

The King's Last Loaf

King Alfred ruled in England long ago. Although he was a King, he may have been a godly man, a follower of Jesus Christ.

At one time, he was defeated in a battle, and he had very little food left, just one loaf of bread. At that time, a beggar came to his castle. The beggar asked for a gift. Probably he was hungry and needed something to eat.

His wife, the Queen, told King Alfred that they did not have enough food for themselves and for the other people who were staying with them in the castle. She thought they could not give anything to the poor man.

The King reminded his wife about a time when Jesus had spoken for a long time to lots and lots of people. When Jesus finished speaking, He knew that the people were hungry. But there was very little food for such a large crowd of people.

They had only five small loaves of bread (about the size of a roll) and two fish. What could they do? Jesus told the people to sit down on the grass. He prayed and broke the food into pieces. Jesus gave the pieces to His disciples (His followers), and the disciples gave the food to the people. Jesus made the food get bigger and so there was enough for everyone to eat. There were even 12 baskets of food left over. The disciples gathered it up so that nothing would be wasted. It could be eaten later.

We must now speak again about King Alfred, his wife and the beggar. The King told the Queen: "Give the poor Christian half of the loaf". The kind King knew that Jesus could make half a loaf to be enough food for everyone in the castle, because he had made five loaves and two fish to be enough food for the big crowd of people.

The poor man went away with his half of the loaf. But what about

the King and all the others staying in the castle? Some of them had gone out in search of food, and they soon came back with lots of food. Whatever we need, God is able to give it to us.

The Bible Made Valuable

One day, a woman was walking along a lonely road when two suspicious looking men approached her. As they came near, she felt unsafe and looked around anxiously for help. No one was to be seen; the dreary moor stretched out on all sides without one house in sight; escape was impossible. And she reproached herself bitterly for having walked along that road alone.

At that moment when she was most afraid, a bird suddenly arose from the ground close beside her. She looked down and saw bright blue forget-me-not blossoms at her feet, clustered along the edge of the stream beside her. They made her remember the One to whom the beauties of such desolate areas belong; He created them. They brought a message of peace to her heart, and she walked forward calmly.

The men soon came up to her and, as she expected, they asked her for "charity".

"I have no money with me", she told them.

"But we must have something", they said, with their eyes fixed on her gold watch.

She at once took out her pocket Bible and handed it to them. They looked surprised, glanced at one other, and politely returned the book. They were going away when the woman said to them: "No, my friends, I must plead with you to take this; it is of more value than silver or gold; for what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" She put the Bible into their hands and hurried away.

Time passed on, and the incident had nearly faded from the woman's memory, when a terrible accident happened at a nearby quarry. A large block of stone fell; one man was killed on the spot, and several others were very badly injured. As the "quarry village" was some distance from her home, the woman did not go to see the injured men until a poor woman came one day to her house and asked her to go to visit her husband. This woman told her he was very ill, and that the doctor did not think "he was long for this world".

So she went, and with a feeling of disgust entered the filthy building pointed out to her. The loud, angry voices and the strong smell of whisky which met her, before her eyes could recover from the blinding effect of the

smoke that escaped through the door, almost made her turn back – for there was no chimney. She stood still for a few moments, and soon noticed a few rags in the corner, on which the poor man was lying.

He raised himself on his elbow as she approached, and held out her old pocket Bible. He said, “Lady, do you remember that? It has indeed been more precious to me than silver or gold. It has told me of Christ and of hope.”

The lady gazed at his death-like features; she could not be mistaken; she remembered the man who, in his days of strength, had forgotten God. But now, among ungodly people he knew, this man seemed to be confessing Him. She was overcome, but seeing his time on earth was drawing very near its end, she said, “Thank God, my friend, if this book has told you of Christ, but what has it told you of yourself?”

“It has told me I am a vile sinner.”

“And do you feel yourself a sinner?” she asked.

“Feel myself a sinner? Was there ever such a one out of hell? Such a drunkard, such a swearer, such a Sabbath-breaker. I am indeed the chief of sinners.”

“In what then is your hope?”

“My hope is in Christ”, replied the dying man. “He has shown me my sins, but He has also shown me His righteousness; in Him is my hope, and in Him is my salvation.”

This was enough, the lady no longer doubted but rejoiced over her brother who had been lost, yet had been found again. After some more conversation, she asked about his companion, who had been with him when she gave them the Bible.

“That is the sad thing, my lady; his is the sad story, poor man.”

“Was it he that was killed when the stone fell?” she exclaimed.

“No, far worse than that, poor fellow. May God help him!”

He seemed unwilling to speak, but when many of those who were in the room had left, he said, “You see, my lady, the thing is this, we took little thought of that blessed Book for a while after you gave it, and we kept on in our wicked courses, till John, poor lad, took ill, and then he began to read, and to talk a deal of what I did not understand, and I thought he had gone mad. But I took the book myself, and soon I saw it was his heart that was turned, not his head. O blessed be the God and Saviour of us both.”

“Well,” said the lady, that is indeed a matter of thankfulness. I do not understand what distresses you about John.”

“John, poor lad, you see, after we both began to read, the girls there [meaning John’s and his own wife] and the lads about began to talk, and the priest got hold of it, and just then the stone fell at the quarry and Tim O’Neal

was killed, and many more were not much better, myself one of them. And after that, the priest came up and attacked us both, and said it was a judgment on us for reading in the Book without his permission – for, you see, we were from Ireland. And he laid penances on us – for the saving of our souls, he said – and we did all he told us, but our souls were not much [not at all, he meant] the better for it.

“And when he came again, we told him so, and he swore at us and said we were heretics, and that he would not give us absolution [pardon of our sins], and that if I died I would go to burnings [to hell]. But by that time, blessed be God, I had more light in my mind, and I was not afraid. So I told him it was the absolution of God I needed, and if I had that, I cared for no more.

“He would have made the house too hot for me if he could, he was in such a rage and wanted me to give up my Book. But that’s what I would not do, and I just said, ‘Not all the priests in Ireland would get me to give up that blessed Book’.

“‘But you shall’, says he.

“‘But I shall not’, says I, ‘for it is God’s book, and not yours.’ At that he left the house swearing and saying he would bring us to justice, and would tell the landlord that we were poachers [taking salmon probably, which by law belonged to the landlord]. And so we were, my lady, before the Lord in His love taught us better; and to be sure he gave information [to the police], and they have carried poor John to prison [for being a poacher]. They could not take me, for I was ill; and when they ask John about it, he will have to say that it is all true, for you know he cannot now say one word that God will not hear.”

The lady felt very sorry for this trial of John’s principles; but comforted John’s friend, saying that if he was indeed the child of God, all things must work together for his good and that she would pray for him.

“Ah, prayer is the thing, my lady. Prayer is the thing for dying sinners. O pray for me too, that the Lord may be with me to the end.”

The woman paid several other visits to her dying friend, and each time she found him more and more confirmed in the faith. He lived to see “poor John” released from prison and begin a quiet, sober and hard-working life. He left his precious Bible to John and, with his last breath, asked him to love that Book above silver or gold. The Bible had indeed become highly valuable to both men.

Remember, “What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:36).

Adapted from *The Christian Treasury* for 1853

Looking Around Us

The Iran War

War is a terrible thing. So many lives are lost when one nation takes military action against another, and a huge amount of damage is done, especially by bombing, not least the explosives that are delivered to their targets by drones. Perhaps it is even worse when civil war breaks out, when one part of a country begins to fight against another part.

We should look at war as one of the judgements that God uses when He has reason to punish at least one of the nations involved. We often read in the Old Testament of nations coming to fight against Israel or against Judah after they had turned away from worshipping the true God and bowed down instead to idols.

Some of these wars, or more local conflicts, achieve some of their aims, but others do not. What we have to remember is that God is in control of everything (but He is in no way involved in the sins of human activity). We should remember the saying, “Man proposes, but God disposes”. Human beings, including presidents and prime ministers, have their purposes in what they do; they may put great effort, at huge cost, into building up large military forces, but they may in the end be defeated. All the outcomes are in the hand of God, and He will bring all His purposes to pass. In matters of great significance and in matters of little significance, God is the One who has final control over everything that happens.

The war in Iran no doubt has some justification: that country has been refining nuclear materials that could be used in a bomb, which could have devastating effects, especially in nearby countries, including Israel. But one hesitates to come to a definite conclusion about the Iran war. Yet it is much easier to condemn Russia for its attack on Ukraine. Those who are responsible for starting a war bear tremendous responsibility. But one thing is certain: those leaders of countries and their advisers who attack other countries must give account for all their actions before the judgement seat of Christ, who will pass proper, accurate judgement on what they have done. Of course, we must all appear there to be judged for all we have done in every situation.

Countries such as the United Kingdom have little involvement in the Iran war, yet they may suffer consequences from the war. These include the increased price of oil, because Iran is restricting the supply of oil by making it very dangerous for ships to pass through the Strait of Hormuz. The higher price of oil feeds through to increases in the cost of many other things.

Political parties put great emphasis on growth, on increasing prosperity, but they generally have no interest in the spiritual welfare of their country

and its people, and they do not seek God's blessing on their activities. As a result of the Iran war, growth looks very unlikely at present; clearly we do not have God's blessing in the UK, in particular, because we do not seek Him. God said to Israel long ago: "Seek ye Me, and ye shall live" (Amos 5:4). He still speaks in these words to nations and individuals.

The Old and New Creations

That was a wonder-working word
Which could the vast creation raise.
Angels, attendant on their Lord,
Admired the plan and sang His praise.*

From what a dark and shapeless mass,
All nature sprang at His command!
Let there be light, and light there was,
And sun and stars and sea and land.

With equal speed the earth and seas
Their mighty Maker's voice obeyed;
He spoke; at once the plants and trees
And birds and beasts and man were made.

But man, the lord and crown of all,
By sin his honour soon defaced;
His heart (how altered since the fall!)
Is dark, deformed and void and waste.

The new creation of the soul
Does now no less His power display,
Than when He formed the mighty whole,
And kindled darkness into day.**

Though self-destroyed, O Lord, we are,
Yet let us feel what Thou canst do;
Thy word the ruin can repair,
And all our hearts create anew.

John Newton

*Job 38:7 **2 Corinthians 4:6.

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