

Malcolm's Monday Musings : 14 April 2025

Greetings.

Yesterday was known to many as 'Palm Sunday'.

Palm Sunday commemorates an event recorded in all four Gospels in the New Testament—our Lord's so-called 'triumphal entry' into Jerusalem, a matter of days prior to His crucifixion.

A few days ago, a dear and long-term friend in America reminded me of a related article ('Absalom and Christ') which I wrote many years ago and which was published at the time in the Precious Seed magazine.

For your possible interest, I reproduce that article (slightly adapted) at the close below.

I set out first the customary 'Musings' document for this week. With an eye to this coming Friday (so-called 'Good Friday'), I have included as the first 'Food for thought' an extract from my own notes on the expression 'death of (or, 'on') a cross' (Phil. 2. 8).

ADVANCE NOTICE

Because of various pressures, I will be issuing no 'Musings' on next Monday, 21st April, but, God willing, 'Normal service will be resumed' on the following Monday, 28th April.

Happy reading.

Yours in our Lord Jesus,

Malcolm

(i) Scripture.

Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned ...

But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many ... if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.

Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life ...

The law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more.

Romans 5. 12-20 (*The New King James Version*)

(ii) Food for thought.

'Being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross' (Phil. 2. 8).

It was no ordinary death that our Lord Jesus died but, as one of the so-called Church Fathers (Origen) describes it, 'the utterly vile death of the cross'.

The first thing to note is the repetition of the word 'death'. Indeed, the Greek text has the two occurrences of the word backed up against each other—'obedient to (the point of) death, death, that is, on a cross'. For *it is in the manner of His death that our Lord's humiliation reached rock bottom.*

Men are sometimes willing to go to death if that death is regarded as in some way noble and heroic. But no illustrious death awaited the Son of man! Far from it! For, to the world of the first century, public execution by crucifixion (death on a gibbet) was utterly revolting—the ultimate in human shame and disgrace. Crucifixion was the most loathsome and degrading death of all. *In polite society, the very word 'cross' was a swearword and an obscenity.*

The feelings of the Roman world for crucifixion are well expressed in the words of Cicero, the great statesman and orator of the 1st century BC. Crucifixion was, he says, 'the most cruel and hideous form of punishment ... the most extreme penalty ... to bind a Roman citizen is an outrage; to scourge him a crime ... how then shall I describe crucifixion? No adequate word can be found ... the very word 'cross' should be foreign not only to the body of a Roman citizen, but to his thoughts, his eyes, his ears'.

The Roman jurist Julius Paulus lists crucifixion as the worst of all capital punishments, listing it ahead of death by burning, death by beheading, or death by being thrown to the wild beasts ... and the Jewish historian Josephus, who witnessed many crucifixions himself, called it 'the most wretched of deaths'.

Philippi was a Roman colony (Acts 16. 2). And, according to Roman law, in almost all cases Roman citizens were exempt from degrading forms of punishment, whether that of public beating with rods, scourging or crucifixion.

'Death on a cross' was almost exclusively reserved for rebels, for military enemies, for violent criminals, for robbers and for slaves. Indeed, slaves were crucified so routinely that crucifixion become known as the 'slave's punishment'. And *this* is the death, Paul says, which the One who had taken 'the form of a servant ('slave')' suffered!

I suspect that the very manner of our Lord's death must have come home with special force to both the writer and the original readers of the letter, in that each of them knew that, being Roman citizens, under no circumstances could they ever themselves suffer the disgrace of 'death on a cross'.

But Paul was not only a Roman citizen—he was a Jew. And if 'a cross' was offensive to Paul as a Roman, it was doubly horrific to him as a Jew. For, to the Jew, crucifixion means being 'hanged up', and God's law is clear that 'he that is hanged is accursed of God' (Deut. 21. 23), which means that anyone crucified is necessarily under the sentence of divine wrath.

Paul knows this text in Deuteronomy well; he quotes it in his letter to the churches of Galatia; 'Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us; *for it is written, Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree*' (Gal. 3. 13).

There can be no doubt that Paul had inherited both the Roman and the Jewish attitudes to crucifixion. But his experience of the Lord Jesus turns that utterly vile form of torture and execution (the scandal of the cross) into Paul's proudest boast: 'God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified to me, and I to the world' (Gal. 6. 14).

'Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more' (Rom. 5. 20).

'The Bible is clear: God does not match our sins with His grace. He overmatches our increased sins with His surplus of hyper-grace (Rom. 5. 20) ... The whole logical structure of the biblical gospel is summed up in two simple words: "much more" (Rom. 5. 15, 17). Your worst sin is far overshadowed by His "much more" grace ...

'All we do in response—all we can do—is receive his grace with the empty hands of faith ... yes, even the dirty hands of sin'.

(R. Ortland, 'Behold, the God of Grace', accessed at <https://www.crossway.org/articles/behold-the-god-of-grace/>.)

Adam and Christ.

(i) Out of love for the woman, Adam descended to where she was, to join her in her sin (Gen. 3. 6; 1 Tim. 2. 14).

(ii) Out of love for the church, the Lord Jesus descended to where she was, to raise her to where He is in glory (Eph. 5. 25-27).

'We departed from the river of Ahava ... and we came to Jerusalem' (Ezra 8. 31-32).

'The four-month journey that lay before Ezra and his companions would not be easy. Marauders hid in the hills, waiting to rob the unsuspecting. And they were transporting a king's ransom, "the silver, the gold, and the articles, the offering for the house of our God which the king and his counsellors and his princes, and all Israel...had offered" (Ezra 8. 25).

'If they didn't have protection, it would be like taking candy from a baby. But there was a complication. The king ... had not offered to send along a guard to protect them on the journey.

'Ezra said, "I was ashamed to request of the king an escort of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy on the road, because we had spoken to the king, saying, 'The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath are against all those who forsake Him'" (Ezra 8. 22) ...

'It wasn't that he couldn't ask the king for a hand ('the king granted him all that he asked, for the hand of the Lord his God was on him', Ezra 7. 7) but ... you can hardly ask a man for help, even if he's a king, if you're already committed to trusting the Lord for His security services. Is He not enough?

'On the other hand, Ezra wasn't about to presume on God's help, either. So, he "proclaimed a fast ... that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way ('a safe journey', ESV) for us and our little ones and all our possessions" (Ezra 8. 21). The result? As expected, "He answered our prayer" (Ezra 8. 23)'.

(J. B. Nicholson Jr, '*Whose Providing Security?*', Taste and See, Uplook Ministries, 3 April 2025).

'I dwell . . . with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit' (Isa. 57. 15).

1. 'He that dwells in the highest heavens dwells in the lowest hearts, and inhabits sincerity as surely as He inhabits eternity. In these He delights'.

(Matthew Henry, '*Commentary on the Whole Bible*', comment on Isa. 57. 15.)

2. 'The Holy One is also the Merciful One, and not only has a manifestation of glory on high, but also a manifestation of grace below ...

'The heaven of heavens is not too great for Him, and a human heart is not too small for Him to dwell in. He who dwells upon cherubim, and among the praises of the seraphim, does not scorn to dwell among the sighs of a poor human soul'.

(Keil and Delitzsch '*Commentary of the Old Testament*', Volume VII, page 379).

'When they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute money came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay tribute? (Matt. 17. 24).

'The payment demanded here is not tribute to Caesar, but dues to the temple ...

'As little is the tone of the demand, "Doth not your Master pay the half -shekel?" that of a rude Roman tax-gatherer, who had detected a Jew in the act of evading, as he supposed, the tax; but is exactly what we might expect, where the duty was one of imperfect obligation, which, if any declined, the payment could scarcely have been enforced ... in the Rabbinical treatise especially relating to the manner of collecting these dues, it is said: "They asked every man for the half shekel quietly". And again: "... From him who gave they received, on him who gave not they used no compulsion" ... 'In His flesh, the true temple was set up (John 2. 21) ... It was not for Him, in whom the Shechinah glory dwelt, to pay dues for the support of that temple built with hands, whose glory was vanishing away. He who should give Himself a ransom for all other souls (Mark 10. 45) could not properly pay a ransom for His own ...

'He pays, but in the manner of His payment reasserts the true dignity of His person, which might else have been compromised in the eyes of some' (Matt. 17. 27).

(R. C. Trench, '*Notes on the Miracles*', pages 404-406.)

Favour bestowed 'for the sake of' another.

(i) Potiphar blessed for Joseph's sake: 'the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house *for Joseph's sake*; and the blessing of the Lord was upon all that he had in the house and in the field' (Gen. 39. 5).

(ii) Mephibosheth sustained for Jonathan's sake: 'And David said unto him, Fear not: for I will surely shew thee kindness *for Jonathan thy father's sake*, and will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father; and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually' (2 Sam. 9. 7; cf. 2 Sam. 9. 1).

(iii) The believer forgiven for Christ's sake: 'Be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God *for Christ's sake* hath forgiven you' (Eph. 4. 32; cf. 'I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake', 1 John 2. 12).

The foreknowledge of God.

1. 'There is a distinction between God's foreknowledge and His omniscience. With His omniscience, God knows perfectly and eternally all that is knowable, whether it is the actual or the possible, or in other words the reality and the alternatives to that reality. However, God's foreknowledge only deals with reality'.

(B. Wenstrom, '*Predestination*', 2024, Page 4.)

2. 'Foreknowledge ... no more changes the nature of a future incident than after-knowledge can affect a historical fact'.

(J. Eadie, '*Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*', page 24.)

3. It is perfectly reasonable to interpret Peter's words in Acts 2. 23 as meaning that the Lord Jesus was 'delivered up' to the suffering of the cross in accordance both (i) with God's own eternal plan and (ii) with God's foreknowledge of men's free and unconstrained actions. That is, such is the glory of God's wisdom that, in His own marvellous and mysterious way, He wove men's (foreknown) sinful

intentions and actions into the fabric of His own wonderful purpose to bring salvation to fallen man. Ultimately, of course, the Lord Jesus had to die (Matt. 26. 24; Luke 22. 22; Acts 4. 28). On the human level, God used the wickedness of man to bring His crucifixion and death to pass—for which the guilty parties were held fully accountable ('you, by the hand of lawless men, have crucified and slain' ... 'you are, that is, truly responsible for having played the part spontaneously which God foreknew you would').

Freewill.

'If (man) cannot exercise freedom of choice, how can he be held responsible for his conduct? Is he not then a mere puppet whose actions are determined by a behind-the-scenes God who pulls the strings as it pleases Him?'

(A. W. Tozer, *'The Knowledge of the Holy'*, page 118.)

'Though ... yet'.

1. Confidence in God. "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him" (Job 13. 15).
2. Confidence in His power. "Though after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God" (Job 19. 26).
3. Confidence in His care. "Although the fig tree shall not blossom yet I will rejoice in the Lord" (Hab. 3. 17, 18).
4. Confidence in His word. "Although my house be not so with God, yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant" (2 Sam. 23. 5).
5. Confidence in His purpose. "Although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary" (Ezekiel 11. 16).
6. Confidence in His service. "Though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers" (1 Cor. 4. 15).
7. Confidence in His renewing. "Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day" (2 Cor. 4. 16).
8. Confidence in the Lord. "Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more" (2 Cor. 5. 16).
9. Confidence in ministry. "Though I be rude in speech, yet not in knowledge" (2 Cor. 11. 6).
10. Confidence in His resurrection. "Though He was crucified through weakness, yet He liveth by the power of God" (2 Cor. 13. 4).
11. Confidence in His example. "Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience" (Heb. 5. 8).
12. Confidence in self. "Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee" (Matt. 26. 35).

(F. E. Marsh, *'Five Hundred Bible Readings'*, pages 85-86.)

Saved.

Tony Bullimore was a British yachtsman who, in early January 1997, capsized about 1500 miles off the south west coast of Australia in the icy waters of the Southern Ocean. He had then been at sea for two months, competing in a round-the-world non-stop solo yacht race ['The Vendée Globe'].

Mr Bullimore was sheltered in a tiny air pocket in the upturned hull of his yacht for the best part of five days. Canberra marine rescue officers had received a distress signal, which triggered a huge rescue mission. Australian defence forces were involved in a long-distance air and sea operation. Nobody had ever been rescued so deep in the Southern Ocean before, but, in spite of appalling weather conditions, the rescue services continued their search, until Mr Bullimore was rescued on 9th January 1997 by Warship HMAS Adelaide.

Mr Bullimore later wrote a book, appropriately titled "Saved". In it he tells how, a few days after his rescue, he arrived safely at Fremantle, by Perth. It was estimated that 10,000 people lined the dockside. No less than 150 journalists were there. After Mr Bullimore had given a brief speech, one journalist questioned the huge bill for the rescue, which had fallen upon Australian taxpayers. Apparently, Warship HMAS Adelaide alone had used 600,000 litres of fuel. Apart from which, there had been the risks taken by the rescue forces as RAAF pilots had skimmed giant waves in winds that rarely dropped below 45 knots.

'There is something a little absurd about the tremendous cost of rescuing people who attempt difficult challenges', Tony Bullimore admitted. 'I have thought about it very deeply, and I don't know whether we have the right to lean on society, communities or countries to say, "Well, here we are, come and rescue us" ... Let me say one last thing. Thank you, Australia for giving back my life. Thank you very much'.

No, there was absolutely no way that Tony Bullimore could begin to justify the enormous cost of his rescue. He could only be extremely grateful that it had been paid.

And, frankly, I am in a somewhat similar position. I had no right to look up to heaven and say to the Son of God, 'Well, here I am, come and rescue me'.

(Reproduced, without footnote references, from pages 2 and 3 of the attachment to the Monday Musings for 11 May 2020—accessible at <https://voicesforchrist.org/writings/100>.)

Truly, it was in His great grace that ...

'He saw me plunged in deep distress,
And flew to my relief'.

(The hymn, 'Majestic sweetness sits enthroned', composed by S. Stennett and published by John Rippon in 'Selection of Hymns from the Best Authors', 1787.)

(iii) Go on, smile.

David is out shopping with his wife, Carol. And this is not a shopping expedition that he's enjoying.

For over forty-five minutes, he's been twiddling his thumbs while Carol has been in the Womenswear Department of the John Lewis store. He can't leave the Department because she's ordered him to stay until she finds a suitable new outfit.

David is now getting very tired and irritable. And then, for the seventh time, Carol comes out of the changing rooms. She is wearing yet another outfit.

David looks Carol up and down and says, 'Great, darling, that is the one. Not only does the outfit fit you perfectly, but it's your favourite colour as well. Go ahead and buy it—whatever it costs—and then let's get something to eat'.

'You dummy', Carol responds, '*This is the outfit I was wearing when we came here*'.

Absalom and Christ

One of the key historical events associated with Easter time is that of our Lord's so-called 'triumphal entry' into Jerusalem.

The present article aims to identify thirteen points of contrast between 'the Son of David', who then rode on an ass¹ and another son of David who, some thousand years previously, rode on a mule. This other son of David was Absalom.²

Contrast:

1.

(i) **Absalom** 'rode on a mule' in a 'wood', after which the mule was left to wander 'away'.³

(ii) **The Lord Jesus** was 'sitting upon an ass' as He approached and entered a 'city', Jerusalem.⁴ Doubtless, the ass was returned immediately the Lord had no further 'need' of it.⁵

2.

(i) When **Absalom** left Jerusalem, he left as a 'king'.⁶ But Absalom occupied David's throne only as a usurper. He 'reigned'⁷ only in consequence of his recent deceit and empty promises of 'justice'.⁸

(ii) When **the Lord Jesus** entered Jerusalem, He entered as its true 'King'.⁹ He was destined to occupy David's throne and to reign in accordance with ancient prophecy, which included the specific promise that He should be 'just'.¹⁰

3.

(i) **Absalom** was the rebellious son of an indulgent father. His father, for his own 'sake', wanted Absalom spared from the consequences of *his* sinful actions.¹¹

(ii) **The Lord Jesus** was the ever-obedient Son of a holy and loving Father. Yet this Father, for our sakes, 'spared not His own Son'¹² from the consequences of *our* sinful actions.

4.

(i) **Absalom** rode the mule when fleeing from his foes. He had faced three distinct forces; namely, those under the leadership of Joab, Abishai and Ittai.¹³

(ii) **The Lord Jesus** rode the young ass when going to face His foes. He, too, faced three distinct foes; namely, the hatred of men, the power of darkness¹⁴ and the sins of His people.¹⁵

5.

(i) There was one man who knew where to find **Absalom** among the trees of the wood.¹⁶ He would not have harmed the son of David even for 'a thousand pieces of silver'.¹⁷

(ii) There was a man who knew where to find **the Lord Jesus** among the trees of the garden.¹⁸ He betrayed Him for only 'thirty pieces of silver'.¹⁹

6.

(i) Following his ride in the wood, **Absalom** was found 'hanged in' a tree.²⁰

(ii) In less than a week after His ride into Jerusalem, **the Lord Jesus** was 'hanged on a tree'.²¹

7.

(i) 'While he was yet alive', the body of **Absalom** was pierced by 'darts' ('javelins', 'staves') from the hand of one of the commanders of the army of Israel.²²

(ii) When **the Lord Jesus** 'was dead already', His body was pierced by a spear ('lance') in the hand of one of the soldiers of the army of Rome.²³

8. Both Absalom and the Lord Jesus were 'slain' by their foes.²⁴ Even at the moment of death, however, there was one notable difference between the two.

(i) When **Absalom** died, he was altogether helpless and unable to save his life.

(ii) But **the Lord Jesus** 'delivered up His spirit',²⁵ having earlier declared, 'I lay down my life ... No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself'.²⁶

9.

(i) The corpse of **Absalom** was taken down from the tree by his enemies and ignominiously 'cast into a great pit'.²⁷ It was the body of a man of violence²⁸ and of guile.²⁹

(ii) The foes of **the Lord Jesus** doubtless intended that His body should be cast with shame into a common grave for criminals. Their wishes were frustrated, however, by the timely intervention of 'a rich man of Arimathea, named Joseph'.³⁰ As a result of Joseph's action, the body of the Lord Jesus was taken down from the tree by loving hands.³¹ His enemies 'appointed His grave with the wicked, but He was with the rich in His death, because He had done no violence, neither was there guile in His mouth'.³²

10.

(i) The body of **Absalom** remained where it had been thrown—the 'great heap of stones' piled over his burying place guaranteed that.³³

(ii) Blessed be God, the body of **the Lord Jesus** did not remain where it had been laid—in spite of 'the great stone' which secured His burying place.³⁴

11.

(i) 'In his lifetime', **Absalom** had taken steps to ensure that, after his death, his name would be kept 'in remembrance'.³⁵

(ii) **The Lord Jesus**, 'the same night in which He was betrayed', gave instructions to His followers concerning those things which were to be done after His death 'in remembrance' of Him.³⁶

12.

(i) **Absalom** had been praised for his 'beauty'.³⁷ But this beauty had been that merely of body, superficial and physical: 'From the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him'.

(ii) To the believer, the beauty of **the Lord Jesus** is that of character, moral and spiritual. In every way, He is 'without blemish'.³⁸

13.

(i) There was somebody who loved **the man on the mule** so much that he would gladly have died in *his* place.³⁹

(ii) It is breath-taking to realise that **the man on the ass** loved us so much that He actually died in *our* place.⁴⁰

The death of **Absalom** moved David to tears of *grief*.⁴¹ Ought not the death of **the Lord Jesus** move us to tears of *gratitude*? May God forgive our cold and unfeeling hearts!

Take the time today to praise God for the Son of David so very much greater than Absalom.

References

¹ Matt. 21. 7, 9.

² 2 Sam. 18. 6-17.

³ 2 Sam. 18. 7-9.

- ⁴ Matt. 21, 5, 10.
- ⁵ Mark 11. 3.
- ⁶ David told Ittai the Gittite to 'abide with *the king*', 2 Sam. 15. 19.
- ⁷ 2 Sam. 15. 10.
- ⁸ 2 Sam. 15. 1-6.
- ⁹ Matt. 21. 5.
- ¹⁰ Zech. 9. 9.
- ¹¹ 2 Sam. 18. 5.
- ¹² Rom. 8. 32.
- ¹³ 2 Sam. 18. 2.
- ¹⁴ Luke 22. 53.
- ¹⁵ Isa. 53. 6 (the words, 'laid on', denote a hostile and violent attack).
- ¹⁶ 2 Sam. 19. 10.
- ¹⁷ 2 Sam. 15. 12.
- ¹⁸ John 18. 2.
- ¹⁹ Matt. 26. 15.
- ²⁰ 2 Sam. 18. 10.
- ²¹ Acts 5. 30; 10. 39.
- ²² 2 Sam. 18. 2, 14.
- ²³ John 19. 33-34.
- ²⁴ 2 Sam. 18. 15; Acts 2. 23.
- ²⁵ John 19. 30.
- ²⁶ John 10. 17-18.
- ²⁷ 2 Sam. 18. 17.
- ²⁸ 2 Sam. 17. 12-14.
- ²⁹ 2 Sam. 15. 7-12.
- ³⁰ Matt. 27. 57.
- ³¹ John 19. 38-40.
- ³² Isa. 53. 9 (J. N. Darby's 'New Translation').
- ³³ 2 Sam. 18. 17.
- ³⁴ Matt. 27. 60.
- ³⁵ 2 Sam. 18. 18.
- ³⁶ 1 Cor. 11. 24-25.
- ³⁷ 2 Sam. 14. 25.
- ³⁸ 1 Pet. 1. 19. Cf. 'the king in His beauty', Isa. 33. 17.

³⁹ 2 Sam. 19. 33.

⁴⁰ 'The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for (lit. 'instead of') many', Mark 10. 45.

⁴¹ 2 Sam. 18. 33; 19. 1.