

Malcolm's Monday Musings : 11 May 2026

(i) Scripture.

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 'Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus, you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals'.

So, Moses took the rod from before the Lord as He commanded him.

And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, 'Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?' Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank.

Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not believe me, to hallow me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them'.

This was the water of Meribah [*'Strife', 'Contention'*], because the children of Israel contended with the Lord, and He was hallowed among them.

Numbers 20. 7-13 (*New King James Version*)

(ii) Food for thought.

Aaron: led astray.

Aaron had many great qualities but he had his failings too. He lacked strength of character, allowing himself to be easily led.

(i) By the people, he was led into idolatry (Exod. 32. 1-5, 22). In Moses's absence, Israel sought a god other than the Lord, 'in their hearts' turning back again to Egypt (Acts 7. 39-40). Clearly, they had carried this rival god out of Egypt in their hearts and now pressured Aaron to give it a physical form. Surely, if Aaron was aware, as he later claimed, that the people were bent on mischief, it was his duty to resist their demands, even at the risk of his life.

Alas, we find him labouring, not to help 'make' a sanctuary to serve as a focal point for the worship of the true God (Exod. 25. 8), but to 'make' a calf to be worshipped as a false god; not to build an altar where sacrifice would be offered to the Lord, but an altar where sacrifice would be offered to an idol (Acts 7. 41).

Moses had nothing to say to Aaron about his pathetic attempt to excuse himself and to shift all of the blame onto the people. But if Moses had not spoken to God on his behalf, Aaron would have died there and then at the hand of the Lord—as 3,000 guilty Israelites soon would die at the hand of the Levites (Deut. 9. 20).

(ii) By Miriam, he was led into envy (Num. 12. 1-2). That the leprosy was inflicted on Miriam alone implies strongly that she was the instigator. [Miriam is one of three biblical characters inflicted with leprosy by God; the others being Gehazi (2 Kings 5. 27) and Uzziah (2 Chron. 26. 19).]

Again, Aaron is carried along, associating himself with Miriam's insubordination against Moses. This time Aaron was drawn by envy into conflict with the sovereign rights of God! Thinking that we sit in judgement on the poor spiritual condition of others, we too usually expose only our own.

(iii) By Moses, he was led into unbelief and rebellion (Num. 20. 7-12). Aaron was allied to Moses when Moses struck the rock. They committed two great sins: (a) they 'believed' not God, presumably doubting that words addressed to a rock would suffice to bring out water, and (b) they 'rebelled' against God's word (Num. 20. 12, 24).

These very sins had lost the former generation of Israel entry into the promised land (Num. 14. 9, 11; Neh. 9. 12). Together with Moses, Aaron was guilty of the same offences—and paid the same price (Num. 20. 28; Deut. 34. 5)!

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'Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses' (Num. 12. 1).

'The (stated) problem is that because the Lord has spoken through them as well as through Moses, they feel they have the right to share whatever authority he enjoys (Num. 12. 2). But other layers lie hidden: they are upset with Moses because of his marriage to a Cushite (Num. 12. 1). Human motives are often convoluted'.

(D. A. Carson, 'For the Love of God', Volume 1, comment for 5 May.)

'We ... groan ... as we wait eagerly for ... the redemption of our bodies (Rom. 8. 23).

In *Romans 7*, we have the groanings of an undelivered soul (Rom. 7. 25); in *Romans 8*, we have the groanings of an undelivered body.

The Garden of Eden (Gen. 2. 8, 15; 3. 23-24) and the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14. 32 with John 18. 1).

'The outcomes of the two Gardens could not be more different:

- (i) 'In Eden, the decision was taken to eat the forbidden fruit.
'In Gethsemane, the decision was taken to drink the bitter cup.
- (ii) 'In Eden, 'a mist' watered the ground.
In Gethsemane, 'sweat like great drops of blood' fell to the ground.
- (iii) 'In Eden, Adam attempted to hide from God.
'In Gethsemane, Jesus sought Him repeatedly.
- (iv) 'In Eden, Adam attempted to lay the blame on another.
'In Gethsemane, Jesus resolved to take the blame for others.
- (v) 'In Eden, a man stole from a tree, from which came death.
'In Gethsemane, a man stepped Himself to go to 'a tree', from which came life.
- (vi) 'Through his decision in the Garden of paradise, 'the first man' brought agony.
'Through His decision in the Garden of agony, 'the second man' bought paradise'.

(Based on C. Manley, 'He became the better man', accessed at <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/he-became-the-better-man>.)

'Let us build us a city, and a tower, whose top may reach to heaven' (Gen. 11. 4).

'It is not necessary to suppose that any real idea of "scaling heaven" was present to the minds of those who built either the Tower of Babel, or any other of the Babylonian temple towers. The expression used is a mere hyperbole for great height (compare Deut. 1. 28; Dan. 4. 11), and should not be taken literally'.

'*Marginal Notes*', The Bible Student, Volume III, 1883, page 213.)

The Lord's 'favour' bestowed in Egypt.

- (i) 'The Lord was with Joseph and showed him kindness and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison' (Gen. 39. 21).
- (ii) 'God was with Joseph, and delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt' (Acts 7. 9).
- (iii) 'I will give this people favour in the sight of the Egyptians; and when you go, you shall not go empty ... you shall plunder the Egyptians' (Exod. 3. 21-22).
- (iv) 'The Lord gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians. Moreover, the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh's servants and in the sight of the people' (Exod. 11. 3).
- (v) 'The Lord gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. Thus, they plundered the Egyptians' (Exod. 12. 36).

'The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all' (Isa. 53. 6).

'Oh the wonder of it! God takes what He most hates—our sin— and places it upon (Isa. 53. 6) the One He most loves—His Son—so those who hated Him "without a cause" (John 15. 25) could be the object of His love—justified "without a cause" (Rom. 3. 24 Greek)'.

(J. B. Nicholson Jr., '*The Bridegroom*', Uplook Ministries: Taste and See, 7 May 2026.)

'For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be united to his wife, and the two shall be one flesh ... I speak concerning Christ and the church' (Eph. 5. 31-32).

'God was painting on the canvas of creation a picture of His Son's pursuing love for His bride, the church.

'Marriage wasn't just a solution to loneliness—it was a stage for the drama of redemption'.

(Matt Chandler. '*Becoming like Jesus*', Chapter 6.)

'The last enemy to be destroyed is death' (1 Cor. 15. 26).

We can rejoice that the last enemy does not have the last word (Rev. 20. 14).

How each of the four Gospels concludes.

- (i) **Matthew** concludes with the Resurrection, (ii) **Mark** concludes with the Ascension, (iii) **Luke** concludes with the promise of the Holy Spirit, and (iv) **John** concludes with the promise of the Second Coming.

'**Acts 1** brings all four records together and mentions each of these events.

'The four Gospels funnel into the Book of Acts, and the Book of Acts is the bridge between the Gospels and the Epistles'.

(J. Vernon McGee, 'Acts', 1976, Volume 1, page 23.)

Seven occurrences of the expression 'unto the end'.

- (i) 'I am with you always, unto the end' (Matt. 28. 20).
- (ii) 'He loved them unto the end' (John 13. 1).
- (iii) 'Who shall also confirm you unto the end' (1 Cor. 1. 8).
- (iv) 'The rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end' (Heb. 3. 6).
- (v) 'The beginning of our confidence, steadfast unto the end' (Heb. 3. 14).
- (vi) 'Full assurance of hope unto the end' (Heb. 6. 11).
- (vii) 'He that ... keeps my works unto the end' (Rev. 2. 26).

Fact or feelings.

'Christianity is fundamentally a proposition about reality. It's a story about God's entrance into history, and its truth does not depend on my feelings on any given day.'

(M. Worthen, 'Questioning Christianity', interview on Veritas Forum, March 2026.)

'In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing ... abundance and need' (Phil. 4. 12).

'The secret is Christ in me, not me in a different set of circumstances.'

(Elizabeth Elliot, 'A Quiet Heart', Newsletter March/April 1995'.)

In Christ, we are crucified:

- (i) To the law (Gal. 2. 19-20).
- (ii) To the flesh (Gal. 5. 24).
- (iii) To the world (Gal. 6. 14).

Rewards for service.

'The reward at the end of the race is never the motive given to make us enter on the course; it is an encouragement to persevere when one is already engaged therein.

'Jesus Himself knew these encouragements, "Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb. 12. 2).'

(J. N. Darby, 'Brief Notes on the Epistle to the Philippians', Collected Writings, Volume 27, page 178.)

'Keep your heart with all diligence' (Prov. 4. 23).

'Almost twenty years ago, I heard a profane jest and still I remember it. How many pious passages of far later date have I forgotten? It seems my soul is like a filthy pond, where fish die soon and frogs live long.

'Lord, erase this profane jest out of my memory. Leave not a letter thereof behind lest my corruption seek it out again, and be pleased to write some pious meditation in its place. And grant, Lord, for the time to come that I may be careful not to admit what I find so difficult to expel.'

(Thomas Fuller, 'Good Thoughts in Bad Times', 1645, pages 219-220.)

(iii) Go on, smile.

Those who have Eutychus for their role model.

Half way through his midweek message, brother Robinson noticed two teenage girls in the back of the hall giggling and disturbing those sitting around them.

He interrupted his message, to announce sternly, 'There are two of you here who have not listened to a word I've said for the last fifteen minutes. I am sorry to have to say this but, frankly, this is no way to treat the speaker's message and (raising his voice) IT MUST STOP ... NOW!'

It worked wonderfully. The two girls quieted down and didn't make another sound for the rest of the meeting.

As usual, when the meeting was over, brother Robinson went to the door to shake hands with those who had come.

But he was mortified when no less than a third of those leaving approached him quietly ...

to apologise for sleeping through most of his message—and promising him that it wouldn't happen again.

Christ, the Righteous One.

No doubt, many of us would more readily associate the Saviour with descriptions such as ‘the Loving One’, ‘the Compassionate One’, ‘the Gracious One’ or ‘the Lowly One’.

But it was not so for the Christian preachers and writers of New Testament days. Even if we (i) leave aside similar descriptions given to our Lord in the New Testament, such, for example, as that of ‘a righteous man’—given separately (a) by Pilate’s wife,¹ (b) by Pilate himself² and (c) by the centurion charged with overseeing the Lord’s crucifixion³—and (ii) confine ourselves entirely to the exact title ‘the Righteous One’, we find that no less than four of the most prominent early Christians use it to describe our Saviour. And we discover that, interestingly, among them, they do so when focusing our attention on four central aspects of our Lord’s work. And I want to call each of these four men to the witness box for just a few moments.

(i) First, I summons **Stephen**, the first Christian martyr of whom we know, who very shortly before his violent death, challenged the Jewish Supreme Council, ‘Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute, killing those who announced beforehand the coming of the **Righteous One**?’ **Stephen** speaks, therefore, of ‘the coming of the Righteous One’.⁴

(ii) Second, I call the apostle **Peter**, who sometime earlier (indeed, very soon after our Lord’s crucifixion and resurrection) accuses the people of Jerusalem that, although Pilate had decided to release Jesus, ‘you denied the Holy and **Righteous One** ... and you killed the Author (‘the Originator’, ‘the Source’) of life’.⁵ **Peter** speaks, therefore, of ‘the betrayal and the death of the Righteous One’.

(iii) Next, I summon the apostle **Paul**, who, at the time of his arrest in Jerusalem some 24 years after the martyrdom of Stephen, relates to a large crowd there words spoken to him by a man named Ananias just three days after his (Paul’s) conversion, ‘The God of our fathers appointed you to know His will, to see the **Righteous One** and to hear His voice’.⁶ **Paul** speaks, therefore, of ‘the Righteous One’ whom he had both ‘seen’ and ‘heard’ on the Damascus Road—of the Righteous One who, having died, had been raised by the mighty power of God, to which fact he could bear direct and personal witness.

(iv) And finally, I call another apostle ... **John**, who writes of our Lord as ‘the Righteous One’, who, in the present, appears before God as the believer’s legal representative with God—as his or her ‘Counsel for the Defence’, if you like. John’s words are, ‘If we say that we have not sinned, we make God a liar ... But if anyone sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the **Righteous One** and He is the propitiation (“the atoning sacrifice”) for our sins’.⁷ **John** speaks, therefore, of ‘the Righteous One’ as our Defence Counsel, who appears today before God the Father on our behalf.

There is no question, therefore, that the early Christians laid great emphasis on the fact that our Lord Jesus was ‘the Righteous One’. And scholars tell us that, in those ancient days, the Greek world regarded ‘a righteous man’ as one who never failed in his duty to God and to man. And, surely, there has never been anybody (whether in Israel or anywhere else) who has so perfectly fulfilled His duty to God and to man as did our Lord Jesus. No wonder then that, to the early Christians, He was ‘the Righteous One’ *par excellence*.

And I guess that none of us has any problem with that.

Our problem stems rather from the fact, that, whereas **He** (our Lord) is righteous, **we** are anything but that—for we have all miserably failed in our duties both to God and to one another. And should our consciences be so stifled and hardened as not to trouble us about our lack of righteousness before God, let God tell us of it Himself—for both Old and New Testaments unite in telling it to us straight that, in God’s sight, ‘There is none righteous, no, not one’.⁸

And so, in stark contrast to ‘the Righteous One’ (our Lord Jesus), we stand before God, stripped of any pretended righteousness, condemned and lost.

Ah but but the marvellous truth of the Christian gospel is that the One who was (and is) righteous once suffered on behalf of those who aren’t! Let us hear you say it, Peter (and I am quoting from one of his epistles found in our New Testament), ‘Christ ... suffered for sins once and for all, the Righteous One for the unrighteous ones, that He might bring us to God’.⁹ Yes, that is what happened at the cross—He, the Righteous One, willingly stood in as our substitute to take the punishment on account of our unrighteousness.

I don’t know if you are familiar with the name Sydney Carton but those words ‘stood in as our substitute’ remind me very much of him. Sydney Carton was, in many ways, the principal character in Dickens’ classic novel, ‘*A Tale of Two Cities*’. To cut a long story short, Carton was a self-indulgent

and self-pitying drunkard, who, out of love for Lucie Darnay, took the place of her husband, Charles, in the Bastille and was beheaded in his place—‘a far, far better thing’, as he expressed it, than he had ‘ever done’. It was the case of one man willingly sacrificing his own life to save that of another.

But there is a whole world of difference between Sydney Carton and our Lord Jesus—not least in this, that, as noble as Carton’s act undoubtedly was, it was also, if anything, a case of the bad (of ‘the unrighteous’, if you like) taking the place of the good (of ‘the righteous’, if you like). Whereas our Lord Jesus was the supremely ‘Righteous One’ who took the place of the unrighteous!

But not only so. For Sydney Carton suffered a quick and more-or-less painless death by way of the guillotine, whereas our Lord Jesus suffered a slow and agonising death by way of the Cross.

But the most important difference lies, surely, in this, that the story of Sydney Carton is pure fiction—that the whole of Dickens’ story, though a classic of English literature and though very well researched, in the end is no more than a novel whilst the better story (of the ‘Righteous One’ who suffered on behalf of us the unrighteous) is certainly not fiction. *The better story actually happened!*

I close with two verses of a hymn, written by a man whose lifetime spanned more or less the same period as that of Charles Dickens. The man’s name was Horatius Bonar ... and the verses run ...

Rejoice and be glad!
For the blood hath been shed;
Redemption is finished,
The price has been paid.

Rejoice and be glad!
Now the pardon is free!
The Just for the unjust
Has died on the tree.¹⁰

Notes

¹ Matt. 27.19.

² Matt. 27. 24.

³ Luke 23. 47.

⁴ Acts 7. 52.

⁵ Acts 3. 13-15.

⁶ Acts 22. 14.

⁷ 1 John 1. 10 to 2. 2.

⁸ Rom. 3. 10.

⁹ 1 Pet. 3. 18.

¹⁰ Mr Bonar’s hymn is often titled, ‘Rejoice and be glad, the Redeemer has come’.