

Greetings.

'Reformation Day' and Luther's 'beloved psalm'.

You may or may not be aware that yesterday, 31st October, was 'Reformation Day'.

Each year, 'Reformation Day' marks the anniversary of the date in 1517:

(i) on which (according to Philip Melanchthon in 1546) Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-five Theses on the door of the All Saints' Church in Wittenberg, Germany, and

(ii) which is generally identified as the beginning of the Protestant Reformation.

Today, I fast forward the story to 1530. At that time, Luther was under the Imperial Ban (stripped of all his rights and declared legally dead) imposed by the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, and subject to arrest as an outlaw if captured.

During the period from April to October, he was given refuge in the fortress of Coburg. When there, he dedicated his translation and exposition of Psalm 118 to his patron, Abbot Frederick of Nuremberg.

In the preface to his commentary, he wrote:

While I should like to show my gratitude to you for your love and favour to me, I am, by earthly standards, a beggar. Besides, even if I had much, there is nothing special I could do for you in your position.

And so I turned to my wealth, which I treasure so much, and took up **my beloved psalm** [Psalm 118], putting down on paper the thoughts which came to me ... These thoughts of mine I decided to send you as a gift. I have nothing better ...

This is **my own beloved psalm**. Although the entire Psalter and all of Holy Scripture are dear to me as my only comfort and source of life, **I fell in love with this psalm especially**.

Therefore, I call it my own. When emperors and kings, the wise and the learned, and even saints could not aid me, this Psalm proved a friend and helped me out of many great troubles ...

But lest anyone, knowing that this psalm belongs to the whole world, raise his eyebrow at my claim that this psalm is mine, may he be assured that no one is being robbed. After all, Christ is mine, and yet He belongs to all believers.

I will not be jealous but will gladly share what is mine. **Would to God all the world would claim this psalm for its own, as I do!** ... May Christ our Lord help us by His Spirit to love and honour His holy Word with all our hearts'.

(Translated by George Beto in 'Luther's Works: Volume 14', pages 45-46. Accessed at ... <https://archive.org/details/luthersworksv14p3unse/page/44/mode/2up>.)

Confident that, in spite of his many powerful enemies, he was safe until his work on earth was done, Luther adopted verse 17 of Psalm 118 ('I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord') as

'a kind of motto ... He had written the text on the wall of his study at the Coburg fortress in 1530'.

(James L. Brauer, 'Luther's Hymn Melodies', page 15.)

Today, let us each respond afresh to the appeal which both opens and closes Luther's 'beloved psalm':

'Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; for His mercy endures forever' (Psalm 118. 1, 29).

This week's 'Musings' follow below. (Be prepared to be transported from Germany to England ... from the fortress at Coburg to a museum at Chester and the bay at Pevensy.)

Happy reading.

Yours in our Lord Jesus,

Malcolm

(i) Scripture

Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; for His mercy endures forever ...
 The Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me? ...
 It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man ...
 The right hand of the Lord is exalted; the right hand of the Lord does valiantly.
 I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord ...
 The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.
 This was the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.
 This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it ...
 Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! ...
 You are my God, and I will praise you; you are my God, I will exalt you.
 Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; for His mercy endures forever.

Psalm 118. 1, 6, 8, 16-17, 22-24, 26, 28-29 (*The New King James Version*)

(ii) Food for thought.

'Thou art my God, and I will praise Thee: Thou art my God, I will exalt Thee' (Psalm 118. 28).

'Psalm 118 is quoted by the Lord Jesus during His ministry, and when He sang a hymn with His disciples before leaving the Upper Room for the Mount of Olives on His last evening, it is most likely that this was the hymn, or Psalm, which they sang, for it was the closing Psalm of the Passover celebration ...

'Notice the repeated, "my God ... my God" of verse 28. How feelingly would the Lord Jesus have sung these in the conscious knowledge that soon He would cry, from the pain of the cross, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?". Now, in the Upper Room, He would join in the praise, extolling and exalting Jehovah'.

(J. M. Flanigan, *'Psalms (What the Bible Teaches)'*, pages 503, 509).

Divine similes: the Lord 'as'

(i) As an eagle: 'As an eagle stirs up its nest, hovers over its young, spreading out its wings, taking them up, carrying them on its wings, so the Lord ...' (Deut. 32. 11-12).

(ii) As a man: 'I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipes a dish, wiping it, and turning it upside down' (2 Kings 21. 13).

(iii) As a father: 'As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him' (Psa. 103. 13).

(iv) As a shepherd: 'He who scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him as a shepherd does his flock' (Jer. 31. 10).

(v) As a bear and a lion: 'He has been to me as a bear lying in wait, as a lion in ambush' (Lam. 3. 10; cf. Hos. 13. 7-8).

(vi) As a moth: 'I will be to Ephraim as a moth, and to the house of Judah as rottenness' (Hos. 5. 12).

(vii) As a hen: 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem ... how often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not' (Matt. 23. 37 // Luke 13. 34).

'If not, we shall know it is not His hand that smote us: it was a chance that happened to us' (1 Sam. 6. 9.)

'The Philistine priests and diviners wanted unmistakable evidence that it was the God of Israel who had visited them in judgement, and that their present suffering was no mere 'chance' happening.

'So they deliberately chose milking cows. They knew that, for such cows to desert the penned-up calves for which they were providing milk, and to pull a heavy cart over the twelve miles or so to Bethshemesh, was wholly contrary to their maternal instincts. If they did so, it would be proof positive that the cows were being constrained by a higher—a divine—impulse. And, indeed, the constant 'lowing' of the cows as they headed without deviation to the required destination expressed their distress and longing for their calves.

'This could then be no 'chance' happening. But neither was it a problem to Him who had once directed the right number of each species of living thing into a very different kind of 'ark' (Gen. 7. 8-9). (*'Living in the Promised Land'*, Precious Seed Publications, page 108.)

'Let your ear be attentive ... to hear the prayer of your servant' (Neh. 1. 6).

'In prayer, it is not the lip it comes from, but the ear it goes to, that is the great thing'.

(G. V. Wigram, quoted in *'Food for the Flock'*, 1881, page 168.)

'It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn Thy statutes' (Psa. 119. 71).

'Referring to the physical sufferings of one of his missionary brethren, Dan Crawford suggestively writes that the burden "may have only looked to outsiders like a tombstone hung round his neck, whereas in reality it was only a weight necessary to keep down the diver while he was collecting pearls" ...

'Verily afflictions are weights. Yet they are not sent to crush us, but only to enable us to gather the precious pearls of Divine truth, and to add to our rich stores of Christian experience'.
(James Smith, '*Scripture Couplets*', Handfuls on Purpose, Number 0088.)

Five who held their peace.

- (i) 'Jacob held his peace' (Gen. 34. 5).
- (ii) 'Aaron held his peace' (Lev. 10. 3).
- (iii) Saul 'held his peace' (1 Sam. 10. 27).
- (iv) David said, 'I held my peace' (Psa. 39. 2).
- (v) 'Jesus held His peace' (Matt. 26. 63 // Mark 14. 61).

Two prodigal sons: illustrating 'the high cost of low living'.

(i) The **Old Testament** Prodigal Son (Deut. 21. 18-21) was 'a glutton and a drunkard'.

He was incurable – 'stubborn and rebellious' – and was stoned to death.

(ii) The **New Testament** Prodigal Son (Luke 15. 11-24) 'wasted his substance with riotous living'.

He was repentant – 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight' – and was restored, as one who had been dead and was alive again.

'Before Abraham was, I am' (John 8. 58).

"In the whole history of the world, there is only one person who not only claimed to be God Himself but also got enormous numbers of people to believe it".

(Tim. Keller, '*Making Sense of God*', page 237.)

Tears at the Mount of Olives.

(i) 'David went up the ascent of the Mount of Olives, **weeping** as he went, barefoot and with his head covered' (2 Sam. 15. 30).

David ascending, having been compelled to leave Jerusalem, weeping for himself.

(ii) 'As He drew near, already at the descent of the Mount of Olives ... And as He drew near, seeing the city, He **wept** over it' (Luke 19. 37, 41).

Jesus descending, willingly approaching Jerusalem, weeping for others.

'The wondrous cross'.

'He (i) could pray to His Father, and He would send Him twelve legions of angels; or He (ii) could have wrought a miracle and delivered Himself; or (iii) walked away in Gethsemane when all fell to the ground.

'But He did not come into this world for that; neither did He come into the world simply to go out of it as rejected. When we see Him dying, we cannot but see that there was some thought and intention which could only be made good through that death ...

'Man would not have Him, and He goes on to the cross; and God ... was glorified in the death of Jesus ...

'All along for His love He got hatred; but this did not hinder the love, it only led to its full expression ...

'If (i) God were to sweep away all in judgment, righteousness might be seen, but there would be no love; if (ii) He were to receive all passing over sin, there would be no righteousness.

'But, *when Christ takes our place on the cross, we get divine righteousness against sin as nowhere else, yet infinite divine love to the sinner*.'

(J. N. Darby, '*Christ on the Cross*', Collected Writings, volume 31, pages 144-145, 149.)

The Lord Jesus exalted: 'that He might'.

(i) 'That He might be the firstborn among many brethren' (Rom. 8. 29).

(ii) 'That He might be Lord both of the dead and living' (Rom. 14. 9).

(iii) 'That He might fill all things' (Eph. 4. 10).

(iv) 'That in all things He might have the preeminence' (Col. 1. 18).

'His eternal power and divinity' (Rom. 1. 20 JND); 'in Him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily' (Col. 2. 9 JND).

We note 'Paul's deliberate differentiation of "divinity" and "Godhead" in Colossians and Romans respectively. He tells how God's eternal power and divinity reveal themselves by the light of nature to

the heathen mind (Rom. 1. 20), but of Immanuel, that in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead embodied (Col. 2. 9).

'The hand of omnipotence may be traced in the countless orbs that bespangle the heavens, and in ... our comparatively tiny globe; but in the Son we beheld the face of God unveiled, the express image and transcript of His very Being'.

(E. K. Simpson, '*Words Worth Weighing in the Greek New Testament*', The Tyndale New Testament Lecture, 1944, pages 12-13.)

The Lamb in the Book of Revelation.

(i) *The worthiness of the Lamb*: 'I heard the voice of many angels ... saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing"' (Rev. 5. 11-12).

(ii) *The wrath of the Lamb*: men 'said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from ... the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?"' (Rev. 6. 16-17).

(iii) *The wife of the Lamb*: 'one of the seven angels ... spoke to me, saying, "Come here, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife"' (Rev. 21. 9; cf. Rev. 19. 7).

(iv) *The wedding feast of the Lamb*: 'he said to me, "Write, Blessed are they which are called to the wedding feast of the Lamb' (Rev. 19. 9).

'This do in remembrance of me' (Luke 22. 19); 'baptizing them in the name ...' (Matt. 28. 19).

Words spoken by Jesus before He died instituted the Lord's Supper; words spoken by Jesus after He rose again commissioned Christian Baptism.

'As often as you eat this bread, and drink this cup' (1 Cor. 11. 26).

'If you walk round the walls of the City of Chester in England, they will show you into a little museum.

'Inside there is a table, and on the table a board painted in dark browns and blues. It looks like a smudge of meaningless colour, and then the keeper will come and bring a brightly coloured tankard and set it down on the board.

'As he does so, he will tell you to look at the curve inside the tankard, and there reflected in the tankard are these colours. But now they are no longer a meaningless shamble of colours, there is a face—the face of the exiled king!

'Living in a country that was against their king, his loyal followers gathered to think about him and plot for him. As they drank that cup and put it on the board the colours meant nothing to the world outside, but to those who knew where to look they saw the very face of the king himself.

'The world thinks it is a cheap thing, my brothers and sisters. They see no value in that bread and wine, but *as you take that cup and as you take that ordinary bread can you not at times see the very face of your absent king?*'

(David Gooding, '*The Lord's Supper: The Importance and Wisdom of the Ordinance*', pages 10-11. Accessed at:

https://www.myrtlefieldhouse.com/cmsfiles/transcripts/Lords-Supper_cch.010.pdf.)

'Give attendance to reading' (1 Tim. 4. 13).

'Be careful, of course, not to ... put the stresses where they ought not to be, after the fashion of the uneducated preacher, who, *thinking that the words printed in italics in the Authorized Version were intended to be emphasized*, severely taxed the gravity of his listeners, in a public reading of the following sentence from the Bible [1 Kings 13. 27], by loudly stressing the last word:

"And he said unto his sons, 'Saddle me the ass'; and they saddled him".

(Ian Macpherson, '*The Burden of the Lord*', page 133.)

'All things are yours ... and you are Christ's' (1 Cor. 3. 21-23).

The spiritually immaturity and carnal Corinthians exhibited a party spirit and boasted in their favourite teachers. 'I am of Paul', 'I of Apollos', 'I of Cephas' were their slogans (1 Cor. 1. 12; 3. 4).

In response, Paul turns the Corinthians' slogans on their head. Far from their claiming, 'I belong to Paul', 'I belong to Apollos' or 'I belong to Cephas', they need to know, he says, that 'all things (including Paul, Apollos, and Cephas) belong to you'!

Not merely, Paul insists, did all God's servants belong to them but so too did all God's creatures. And the inventory which he itemises of the believer's possessions is simply staggering: 'All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours' (1 Cor. 3. 21-22).

But 'all things', he makes clear, belong to them because – and only because – they belong to Christ: 'and you are Christ's' (1 Cor. 3. 23).

The following anecdote is told about William the Conqueror when he landed at Pevensey Bay in 1066 with his Norman invasion force:

'When Duke William himself landed, as he stepped on the shore, he slipped, and fell forward upon his two hands. Forthwith all raised a loud cry of distress. "An evil sign", said they, "is here". But he cried out lustily, "See, my lords, by the splendour of God [Duke William's customary oath], I have taken possession of England with both my hands. *It is now mine, and what is mine is yours*".

(Edward Shepherd Creasy, 'The Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World, from Marathon to Waterloo', volume 2, page 23.)

But you and I bless God for a far greater 'Conqueror' than William ... for Him who shares the spoils of His mighty victory with us, His people!

From the dark grave He rose—
The mansion of the dead;
And thence His mighty foes
In glorious triumph led:
Up through the sky **the Conqueror** rode,
And reigns on high, the Saviour God.

From thence He'll quickly come—
His chariot will not stay—
And bear our spirits home
To realms of endless day;
There shall we see His lovely face
And ever be in His embrace.

(Samuel Stennett; the hymn, 'Come, every joyful heart'.)

(iii) Go on, smile.

1. Little Daniel was always on the lookout for danger. One day, his mother forgot the beef joint cooking in the oven and it caught fire.

Daniel sprang into action and immediately called the fire department.

'Hurry, hurry, come quickly', he cried into the phone, 'Our house is on fire!'

'It's alright. I understand', the telephone operator replied, 'but how do we get to your house?'

'Don't be silly', little Daniel shouted back, '*use your big red truck!*'

2. One night, Mrs Osborne stumbled into her local police station. She had a black eye.

She told the police officer on duty that she had thought she had heard a noise in her back yard earlier and had gone out to look around. The next thing she knew, she told him, she was hit hard in the eye and knocked out cold.

The officer on duty called his sergeant quickly and soon an officer was dispatched to Mrs Osborne's house to investigate.

The policeman returned an hour later, nursing a big black eye.

'Do you suppose', the sergeant asked, 'that you were struck by the same assailant?'

'No, sarge', he replied. '*I stepped on the same rake*'.