

## Malcolm's Monday Musings : 22 November 2021.

Greetings.

Please see below your weekly 'Musings' from me.

Happy reading

Yours in our Lord Jesus,

Malcolm

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### **'Large doors often swing on small hinges'.**

We are now well on through the month of November. My attention was recently drawn to the fact that it is 161 years since Abraham Lincoln was elected as the sixteenth President of the United States in November 1860.

Very few would dispute the claim that Abraham Lincoln ranks as one of the greatest Presidents of the United States in all history.

Many were the links in the chain of events which brought Mr Lincoln from the one-room log cabin of his early childhood to the very highest office in the whole land.

One early – and very critical – link consisted in his role as a self-taught (but distinguished and successful) lawyer in the State of Illinois. Mr Lincoln often credited Blackstone's Commentaries (a four-volume series on English common law by Sir William Blackstone) for kindling his desire to become a lawyer.

I will let 'Honest Abe' tell, in what were reported to be his own words, how it all began.

'One day a man who was migrating to the West drove up in front of my store with a wagon which contained his family and household possessions. He asked me if I would buy an old barrel, for which he had no room in his wagon, and which he said contained nothing of special value. I did not want it, but to oblige him I bought it, and paid him, I think, half a dollar for it. Without further examination, I put it away in the store and forgot all about it.

'Sometime after, in overhauling things, I came upon the barrel, and emptying it upon the floor to see what it contained, I found at the bottom of the rubbish a complete edition of Blackstone's Commentaries. I began to read those famous works ... The more I read, the more intensely interested I became. Never in my whole life was my mind so thoroughly absorbed. I read until I devoured them.

'In the succeeding fall [autumn] I was appointed a delegate to a convention, where I was called upon for a speech. After the adjournment, the Judge said to me, "Mr Lincoln, why don't you practise law?" I replied that I had never thought of doing so, as I had never studied law. "But", said the Judge, "you have eminent qualifications for a lawyer, and if you will come to Springfield and read law ... for six months, at the next term of the court, in the spring, I will admit you to the bar".

'This opened up a new life to me. I sold my grocery store, studied law for six months with the firm he named, and at the next term of the court was admitted to the bar'.

(Source: *'My Acquaintance with Abraham Lincoln'* by A. J. Conant, 1893, page 172.)

And the rest, as they say, is history.

Here is a classic case, surely, of how, in the good providence of God, 'large doors often swing on small hinges' – on this occasion, on the kind purchase of an old barrel.

And it is not difficult for us to pinpoint instance after instance on the pages of holy Scripture of the outworking of the very same principle.

By way of example only, consider the following incidents in the lives of:

(i) *Joseph*: the timely arrival at Shechem of some Arabian merchants *en route* to Egypt, of all places (Gen. 37. 25-28).

(ii) *Ruth*: the occasion, when going out to glean, that the young Moabitess just 'happened' to choose the right 'part' of the right 'field' – that of a potential kinsman-redeemer, Boaz (Ruth 2. 3).

(iii) *Esther*: both (a) the fall from favour of Queen Vashti (Esther 1. 12, 19) and (b) the sleepless night of King Ahasuerus (Esther 6. 1-2).

(iv) *David*: the errand on which his father sent him, causing Jesse's then youngest son to leave his father's sheep at Bethlehem and to arrive at the camp of Israel in the valley of Elah at the very time when the Philistine champion issued his defiant challenge to 'the armies of the living God' (1 Sam. 17. 17-23, 26).

(v) *Paul*: the discovery by the apostle's nephew of a Jewish plot to ambush and kill Paul when being taken as a prisoner from Jerusalem to appear before Governor Felix at Caesarea (Acts 23. 12-16).

William Cowper expressed the point well:

'God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform'

'Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and *His ways past finding out!*' (Rom. 11. 33).

Surely, you and I can confidently entrust our lives into the hands of such a God.

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## (i) Scripture

And He left them, and getting into the boat again, departed to the other side. Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread, and they did not have more than one loaf with them in the boat.

Then He charged them, saying, 'Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.'

And they reasoned among themselves, saying, 'It is because we have no bread'.

But Jesus, being aware of it, said to them, 'Why do you reason because you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Is your heart still hardened? Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments did you take up?'

They said to Him, 'Twelve'.

'Also, when I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of fragments did you take up?'

And they said, 'Seven'.

So He said to them, 'How is it you do not understand?'

Mark 8. 15-21 (*The New King James Version*)

## (ii) Food for thought.

### **Missing the point.**

'Orville and Wilbur Wright were excited. On December 17, 1903, they had finally succeeded in keeping their homemade airplane in the air for 59 seconds. Immediately they rushed a telegram to their sister in Dayton, Ohio, telling of this great accomplishment.

'The telegram read, "First sustained flight today fifty-nine seconds. Hope to be home by Christmas". Upon receiving the news, the sister was so excited about the success that she rushed to the newspaper office and gave the telegram to the editor.

'The next morning the newspaper headline read, "Popular Local Bicycle Merchants to be Home for Holidays".

'One of the greatest stories of the twentieth century was missed because an editor missed the point'.

(*'2000 Plus Bible Illustrations'*: article, 'Missing the point'.)

As just two examples among many in Scripture of people who 'missed the point', you might like to read:

(i) *Mark 8. 15-21*, where the Lord Jesus cannot be criticising the disciples for failing to bring bread because He has earlier demonstrated His power to provide all the bread they needed. His warning concerns the teaching of the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and

(ii) Luke 22. 36-38, where the Lord Jesus is not speaking literally about buying swords (cf. vv. 49-51). He is warning the disciples that their circumstances are about to change – that they must be prepared for perilous and difficult times which lie ahead.

### **‘Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah’ (Gen. 23. 19).**

Significantly, the first burial recorded in Scripture comes chronologically only after faith in resurrection has previously been exhibited (Heb. 11. 19; cf. Gen. 22. 13).

So now, the bodies of those who ‘sleep in Jesus’ (1 Thess. 4. 14) are buried ‘in sure and certain hope of the resurrection’ (see 1 Thess. 4. 16; cf. 1 Cor. 15. 52; 2 Cor. 4. 14).

### **‘The only begotten’.**

‘The expression occurs nine times in the New Testament, and on five of these occasions is applied to the Son (John 1. 14, 18; 3: 16, 18; 1 John 4. 9). One passage (Heb. 11. 17) is specially instructive as showing the meaning with which the word is used. There we read, "By faith Abraham when he was tried offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son".

It is evident that the term, "only-begotten son" **cannot** mean that Isaac was the only son begotten of Abraham, for we know that Abraham had other sons (Gen. 16. 15; 25. 1-2). It is equally plain that there was a special relationship between Isaac and Abraham which was unique, and belonged to no other son. It is surely this unique relationship that the term "only-begotten" is used to express.

While Scripture makes very plain that there are distinct Persons in the Godhead, it also shows that the Persons of the Godhead are not independent but related. And, as with Abraham and Isaac, so with Divine Persons, the expression "only-begotten" is used to set forth the unique relationship eternally existing between the Son and the Father’.

(Hamilton Smith, ‘*The Son of God*’, *The Deity of Christ*, pages 10-11.)

### **‘Today’ and seven Cs.**



- (i) **C**onversion: ‘Today I must abide at thy house ... This day is salvation come’ (Luke 19. 5, 9).
- (ii) **C**onsecration: ‘Consecrate yourselves today to the Lord’ (Exod. 32. 29).
- (iii) **C**alling: ‘Today if ye will hear His voice’ (Psa. 95. 7; Heb. 3. 7, 15; 4. 7).
- (iv) **C**ommanding. ‘The Lord thy God redeemed thee: therefore I command thee this thing today’ (Deut. 15. 15).
- (v) **C**rying. “Hearken unto the cry and to the prayer, which Thy servant prayeth before Thee today” (1 Kings 8. 28).
- (vi) **C**onsulting: ‘Inquire, I pray thee, at the word of the Lord today’ (2 Chron. 18. 4).
- (vii) **C**hrist: ‘Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever’ (Heb. 13. 8).

### **‘No room’.**

‘Luke records, "there was no room for them in the inn (*kataluma*)” (Luke 2. 7). The only other New Testament reference to *kataluma* was the upper chamber “guest room” of a Jerusalem house where the Last Supper was held (Luke 22. 11).

‘There is no reason why Luke’s use of *kataluma* in Luke 22. 11 (“guest room”) on the last night of Jesus’ life should be different from his use of the same term in Luke 2. 7 (“inn”) on the first night of His life. ‘In fact, there may even be some symbolism with these “guest rooms” serving as bookends to His life and ministry ...

‘We should think of that first Christmas with baby Jesus placed in a manger on the ground floor of David’s ancestral home in Bethlehem because the upstairs “guest room” was already full’.

(Gary Byers, ‘*Away in a Manger*’, Associates for Biblical Research, 15 November 2021.)

### **‘He himself has suffered being tempted’ (Heb. 2. 18).**

‘Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is ... You find out the strength of a wind by trying to walk against it, not by lying down ...

We never find out the strength of the evil impulse inside us until we try to fight it: and Christ, because He was the only man who never yielded to temptation, is also the only man who knows to the full what temptation means’.

(C. S. Lewis, *'Mere Christianity'*, page 142.)

***'In that He died, He died unto sin once' (Rom. 6. 10).***

'Christ's death on the cross was a death to sin, the apostle tells us, in the sense that it introduced Him to a condition in which He had no longer any responsibility in relation to it. He had assumed the responsibility of it in love, but He had also discharged it, and *sin had no claim on Him further*'.

(James Denney, *'The Death of Christ'*, page 108.)

**With Christ after death.**

'Three New Testament texts ... depict the status of believers between their death and their resurrection.

In each passage, it is implied that there is no interval between the moment of death and the time of arrival in Christ's presence. To depart is to arrive.

- We are confident, I repeat, and prefer to depart from this body and take up residence with (*pros*) the Lord. (2 Cor. 5. 8)
- I am torn between these two alternatives. I am longing to break camp and so be with (*syn*) Christ, for this is a far, far better state. (Phil. 1. 23)
- Today you will be with (*meta*) me in paradise. (Luke 23. 43)

Although three different Greek prepositions are used in these verses (usually all translated by the English "with"), a single reality is represented—*conscious fellowship with Christ after death*'.

(Murray J. Harris, *'Navigating Tough Texts'*, pages 58- 59.)

***The apostle Paul's expectation.***

'In reality, "We who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess. 4. 17), no more proves Paul believed Christ would return during his lifetime than, "God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by His power" (1 Cor. 6. 14), proves he thought Christ would not return in his lifetime.

Although he uses the first person in both places, Paul is simply identifying himself with the Christians who will enjoy these experiences—whether meeting the Lord and thus escaping death, or dying and ultimately rising from the dead'.

(D. A. Carson, *'For the Love of God - Volume 1'*, 21 October.)

***'Spiritual' in 1 Corinthians.***

- (i) Spiritual *things* (1 Cor. 2. 13).
- (ii) Spiritual *discernment* (1 Cor. 2. 14).
- (iii) Spiritual *men* (1 Cor. 2. 15; 3. 1; 14. 37).
- (iv) Spiritual *seed* (1 Cor. 9. 11).
- (v) Spiritual *food and drink* (1 Cor. 10. 3-4).
- (vi) Spiritual *rock* (1 Cor. 10. 4).
- (vii) Spiritual *gifts* (1 Cor. 12. 1, 14. 1).
- (viii) Spiritual *bodies* (1 Cor. 15. 44, 46).

(C. J. Rolls, *'A Synoptical Study of the First Epistle to the Corinthians'*, page 2.)

***'Be careful for nothing; but ... let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus' (Phil. 4. 6-7).***

'What does He give to the heart that has given all its cares to Him? An answer? No—though we know He does answer—but His peace.

'Is God's heart taken up with circumstances? Is He troubled by them? Is His throne shaken by the folly and wickedness of the world? or even by the failure of the saints? *Put your cares on God, and He will put His peace into your heart*—the ineffable peace of God ...

'The soul, having left all on God, can say, "It is His affair, not mine", He is a happy man going through the world in this blessed fellowship with Christ; raised by the Spirit of God *above his inward sorrows and his outward circumstances*'.

(J. N. Darby, quoted in *'Food for the Flock'*, 1881, page 101.)

**Five thought-provoking quotations about prayer.**

- (i) ***'Prayer is not conquering God's reluctance, but taking hold of God's willingness'***.

(Commonly attributed to Phillips Brooks, the author of the Christmas carol, 'O Little Town of Bethlehem').

(ii) **'It is no more true that God is a Creator of Worlds, than it is that He is a Hearer of Prayer' (Psa. 65. 2).**

(William Patton, *'Prayer and its Remarkable Answers'*, page 56.)

(iii) **'Prayer needs three organs of the body that are all located on the head. The ear hears His word to us, the tongue repeats what we've heard from Him back to Him, and the eye looks expectantly for the answer'.**

(Armin Gesswein, quoted in *'Everything by Prayer'* by Fred A. Hartley, page 91.)

(iv) **'Prayers are measured neither by time nor by number, but by intensity'.**

(Samuel Chadwick, *'The Path of Prayer'*, page 21.)

(v) **'This is what prayer is all about: not what I can get from God, but to have my heart so radically changed by Him that I come to want only what God wants for me'.**

(Richard Burr, *'Developing your Secret Closet of Prayer'*, page 6.)

**'Now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials' (1 Pet. 1. 6 NKJV).**

'No physician ever weighed out medicine to his patients with half so much exactness and care, as God weighs out to us every trial; not one grain too much does He ever permit to be put into the scale'.

(Richard Cecil {who spoke those words in 1794}, quoted in *'Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs Hawkes'* by Catharine Cecil, page 121. The quotation is often wrongly attributed – but without giving any precise source – to Henry Ward Beecher, who wasn't born until 1813.)

**(iii) Go on, smile.**

Shopping with Henry.

**1.**

Henry walks into a hardware store and asks for a chainsaw that will cut down three trees in one hour.

The salesman recommends the top-of-the-line model. Henry is suitably impressed and buys it.

Two days later, he brings it back and says, "This chainsaw isn't any good. It would only cut down one tree and that took a whole day!"

The salesman takes the chainsaw from Henry and starts it up to see if he can work out what is wrong with it,

Henry asks, *'What's all that noise?'*

**2.**

Henry walks into a shoe store and tries on a pair of lace-up shoes.

'How do they feel?' asks the sales clerk.

'Well, to be honest, they feel a bit tight', replies Henry.

The assistant promptly bends down and has a look at the shoes and Henry's feet.

Smiling to himself, he says, 'I think it would help, sir, if you pulled out the tongue'.

Henry replies, *'Theyth sthill feelth a bith tighth'.*